

Rural Men in Urban China:
Masculinity and identity formation of male peasant workers

By

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To My Dear Gonggong (Grandpa)

Abstract

This thesis explores male peasant workers' identity formation in contemporary post-Mao China. It is a qualitative study of 28 male peasant workers. Adopting an interpretivist perspective, this thesis uses a multi-method approach, including life histories, ethnography and discourse analysis. A primary purpose is to address the absence of male peasant workers from the literature on gender and migration as a gendered category and the reductive public representation of them through government and media images. In response, the thesis argues for the need to address the men's self-representation in the construction of their dislocated masculine identities. There is a specific focus on their gendered experiences within the family and the workplace. The thesis examines the interconnections between gender, class and other social categories. A key argument is that the men's narratives serve to challenge the assumptions of elite commentators that the rural men's low status is a result of their continuing to occupy a traditional cultural habitus and thus failing to take up a modern urban identity and lifestyle. Such a position assumes that tradition and modernity exist in an oppositional logic, with the former being displaced by the latter. In contrast, my empirical work clearly illustrates a more complex picture. The male peasant workers deploy traditional cultural practices, such as *xiao* (dao) (filial piety), as a resource to develop 'modern' masculine identities as urban workers.

Keywords:

Masculinity, male peasant workers, rural-urban labour migration, identity formation, gender, class, modernization and development, modernity and Chineseness.

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Glossary

cadre	A person in a position of authority, such as a departmental head or a government or Party administrator.
dagong	The colloquial term for selling one's labour to a boss; to work.
guanxi	A personal relationship or network which is built on pre-existing social connections and contacts in terms of friendships, classmates, relatives. It is preserved and renewed by giving gifts, favours and banquets.
hukou	Refers to the household registration system, which divides the Chinese population into urban residents and agricultural residents
laoxiang	The colloquial term peasant workers use to refer to people from the same village or areas. Sometimes referred to as 'tongxiang'.
mei	The colloquial term referring to sister or young girl
shifu	It literally is translated as 'teacher & father', which refers to a male mentor and supervisor in an apprenticeship or some senior skilled workers in factories. Someone who calls another person 'shifu' is also showing his/her respect to the person they speak to.
suzhi	It is literally translated as 'quality'. It mainly refers to the somewhat ephemeral qualities of civility, self-discipline, and modernity.
xiao (dao)	Filial piety
yuan	Unit of Chinese currency: £1 roughly equals 10 yuan (2009-2010 exchange rate)
zai	The colloquial term referring to young man or son in Cantonese

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Introduction

'[For me] cultural studies is about the historical forms of consciousness or subjectivity, or the subjective forms we live by, or, in a rather perilous compression, perhaps a reduction, the subjective side of social relations.'

----Richard Johnson (1986: 43)

'We cannot understand culture without reference to subjective meaning, and we cannot understand it without reference to social structural constraints. We cannot interpret social behavior without acknowledging that it follows codes that it does not invent; at the same time, human invention creates a changing environment for every cultural code.'

----Jeffrey Alexander (1990: 26)

Background of this Research

The primary aim of this qualitative study is to critically explore Chinese male peasant workers' identity formation within the current historical context of post-Mao modernization. I deploy a multi-method approach including ethnography, life history and discourse analysis to examine the lives of a group of 28 Chinese rural men of 17-48 years of age (see Appendix I) in a southern coastal city – Shantou (see Appendix II). There is a specific focus on their gendered experiences within the family and the workplace. In this introduction, I present the trajectory of the formation of the research, which is closely linked to my own personal and academic biography.

I grew up as part of a generation at the beginning of the government's modernization project following the economic reform of the late 1970s. It was a time of rapid social, cultural and economic transformations. At a personal level we experienced a wide range of changes in our lives that included: a move *from* buying limited daily necessities using government-issued ration coupons *to* choosing a variety of commodities at large shopping malls; having increasing access to western popular culture, listening to *Westlife* and the *Backstreet Boys* when we were teenagers; witnessing local and overseas entrepreneurs setting up new businesses in the city, alongside a fast changing landscape with economic growth enabling the building of skyscrapers in the city centre.

Within this shifting socio-economic context, thousands of rural people moved to work in the cities of southern provinces – including my city, Shantou. In so doing, they were taking part in the modernization project while seeking to ‘make their fortune’. The government uses the term ‘peasant worker’ to describe rural-urban labour migrants. It mainly refers to those people whose household registry is that of peasant, moving from rural villages to work in non-agricultural labour markets in economic developed urban regions (Chinese State Council, 2006a, 2006b). Throughout the thesis I will use the term ‘peasant worker’ to refer to the relocation of surplus rural labour to urban labour markets.

Rural-urban labour migration has become a central government issue, as a key part of a policy to establish a ‘harmonious society’¹ (和谐社会, *hè xié shè huì*). In order to achieve this, the government needs to resolve the material conditions of inequality and the attendant

¹ The Chinese government initiated the proposal of a ‘harmonious society’ to address the social problems resulting from economic growth and modernization. Thus enabling social equality for all the people in China. Source: http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200506/27/eng20050627_192495.html (accessed on 28-02-2010)

social tensions resulting from the Post-Mao economic and social development. However, within this context, public representations of peasant workers are highly contradictory. On the one hand, there are narratives in the media describing these migrants as a potential threat or national burden to the social order of the new cities². On the other hand, there are political representations of peasant workers that portray them as the heroes of China's modernization project. Meanwhile, there is also, within the government and media narratives, concern and sympathy for migrants as victims of discrimination and social injustice in urban areas. However, it is important to stress that the dominant image – the 'preferred reading' in Stuart Hall's (1980) terms – that circulates across the society is that peasant workers constitute a major problem in modern cities. Such representations of peasant workers resonated with my experience of growing up in China. I was told when I was a child to keep a distance from migrant workers. There are still some parts of the small city of Shantou to which I have never been, as I was warned that migrants lived in such areas and it was not safe to go.

My initial research design, informed by the cultural habitus of my earlier life, shared some common public stereotypes about these migrant men as a problematic working class group. The critical theoretical position that I developed during the research and the acknowledgement of methodological autonomy in the research process that enabled me to

² Within such social conditions, the main connotation of peasant worker is similar to that of immigrant in Britain after the recent election, with Labour politicians claiming that a major reason that they did not win was because they did not address 'ordinary' people's fears about immigrants. In response, Umunna and Nandy (2010:29) have suggested: 'Several candidates are already talking about immigration, an issue that was a smokescreen for some of our biggest failures in government – the failure to get to grips with the housing crisis and the failure to address the race to the bottom in wages and conditions for a great bulk of the workforce'. I argue that presently in China, blaming peasant workers or maintaining that peasant workers are a major social problem is similarly a smokescreen in relation to the government's 'sustainable development' policy.

engage with the men's self-representations in their life history accounts served to produce the current research question. The research is explicitly located within the social and cultural conditions resulting from China's economic reform and modernization. From a western perspective it is difficult to understand the dramatic shift in the representation of these men: from heroic peasant in the Mao period to current modernization 'looser' in the post-Mao era. After a few months in the field I realized that it was important to develop an analysis of the historical formation of peasant workers, given the contradictory and most frequently negative public representations of them. Equally important, I came to realize the need to understand how peasant workers made sense of their new social position and experience of the process of rural-urban labour migration, in terms of their constrained and creative responses in a transitional modern globally-inflected Chinese society. A key argument is that their multi-layered narratives serve to challenge the reductionist public definitions of the peasant worker. More specifically, they challenge the assumption of these definitions that the rural men's low status is a result of their continuing to occupy a traditional cultural habitus, thus failing to take up a modern urban identity and lifestyle. In turn, such a position assumes that tradition and modernity exist in an oppositional logic, with the former being displaced by the latter. We can place this position within a definition of Chinese modernization and modernity, as 'catching up with the West'. In contrast, my empirical work clearly illustrates a more complex picture. The male peasant workers deploy tradition as a resource to make sense of their lives in the city, while developing 'modern' masculine identities as urban workers.

The Gap in the Literature: Contribution to Substantive Issues

The focus on Chinese male peasant workers in this thesis may have began with my encounter with a male peasant worker. I remember one year when I was still doing my undergraduate degree at Lancaster University, I went home for the summer vacation. I saw that the domestic cleaner my family employed was a man. This was usually a job carried out by rural women. A main surprise was that the male domestic cleaner challenged my assumption of male rural-urban migrants being associated with heavy labouring in construction and mining. At the same time, I wondered how he felt about publicly performing a 'woman's job'.

In light of the United Nation's Conference on Women and its programme in globally promoting social equality and welfare of women, particularly in third world countries (United Nations, 1995; Steans, 2006), political discussion around gender and rural-urban labour migration has centred on female migrant workers (Dagong Mei). Similarly, the dominant academic focus of gender and rural-urban labour migration is on female migrant workers' subordinated experiences in urban spaces in response to the global feminist movement. More recent research addresses social stratification, providing empirical evidence of rural women's experience of discrimination resulting from lack of access to resources, institutional barriers such as the household registration system and the traditional patriarchal familial culture. However, within the modernization project since late 1970s, discussion about the gendered experience of male peasant workers and migrating masculinities has been absent from academic research and government policy, tending to be subsumed as part of a primary economic interpretation of rural-urban labour migration. Paradoxically, while male peasant workers have been taken for granted as a privileged

gender category, they have been marginalized in government and academic research in contrast to female migrant workers' needs.

My study is built on feminist research that aims to critically explore the experience of rural-urban labour migration through a gender lens. This is particularly salient at a time when there is a lack of consensus in sociology concerning how we conceptualize our understanding of the commonalities of experience and specific (gendered) experiences of modernization in the context of rapid social and cultural transformations at global and local levels (Salih, 2003). Located within the current historical context of Chinese modernization, this research aims to place the study of men onto the map of gender and migration, in response to the recent emerging western research interest in masculinities and migration (Donaldson et al., 2009; Batnitzky et al., 2009) and current research on gender and rural-urban labour migration in China. Addressing gender matters in migration, Mahler and Pessar (2006) advocate the necessity for male researchers to contribute to this field of inquiry, as they suggest that 'there is still much room for additional research and we invite more of our male colleagues, in particular, to take up this call' (2006:51). This informed my initial research question, to provide a sociological account of male peasant workers in terms of social stratification and integration.

The research question was reframed during the process of my study as I encountered new feminist theoretical accounts, working within a British Cultural Studies tradition, with their focus on the intersectionality of categories, including gender, class and ethnicity. This work examines the cultural formation, identity and subjectivity of women and meanings of femininity (Skeggs, 1997). My study shifted to a cultural analytical position influenced by the tradition of British Contemporary Cultural Studies adopting a critical approach to

understanding gender with a specific focus on masculinity (Tolson, 1977; Mort, 1996)). Willis (2004:181) argues that masculinities cannot be understood within a vacuum. Rather, he maintains that ‘they form always in some institutional, class, and power context and in relation to other discourses and symbolic relations in order to really make progress’. Aiming to produce a critical understanding of Chinese male peasant workers’ identity formation, this research focuses on the study of three institutional sites: public narratives, for example, represented within media, government reports and other public fora (chapter 4); male peasant workers’ families and familial gendered relations (chapter 5); and male peasant workers’ participation in the urban workplace (chapter 6).

Research Aim and Objectives

The research question is to critically explore Chinese male peasant workers’ identity formation within the post-reform modernization era. The research objectives are as follows:

1. To develop a critical understanding of the current Chinese social order as a result of the transformation from a Maoist to post-Mao era.
2. To critically engage with Chinese male peasant workers’ narratives located within the family and the workplace.
3. To contribute to an understanding of the impact of gender and class formation on peasant workers.
4. To critically investigate public representations of male peasant workers.
5. To contribute to current intellectual debates about Chinese modernization.

This study explores the research subjects' lives through a dynamic interplay between theory, methods and data collection. The theoretical framework of this project draws upon a synthesis of materialist (focus on socio-economic and political conditions of the modernization project) and post-structuralist (focus on subjectivity and identity formation of migrating men and masculinities) approaches, which enables us to address a fundamental issue in social sciences that of the structure-agency dichotomy, referred to above by Jeffrey Alexander.

The Research Process

Based on a critical perspective, the research shifted from a more traditional sociological focus on stratification to the exploration of male peasant workers' identity formation (Seidman and Alexander, 2001). This research was carried out with a combination of a number of qualitative research methods, including life history, participation observation and discourse analysis of secondary data. The fieldwork was undertaken in Shantou, a well economically developed coastal city in southern China. The main research fieldwork was undertaken during the summer and winter vacations of 2007 and 2008. I recruited my research participants from local private-owned factories through my contacts and snowballing in Shantou. I included research subjects from different age groups and from different rural areas across the country.

A combination of reading the literature on interpretivist methodology and carrying out the empirical research directed me to an understanding of the autonomous validity of methodology, alongside its interconnection with critical cultural theory that informed my

thesis (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Skeggs, 1997, Reay, 1998). As the data collection developed and while operating within a reflexive approach, I gained insights into the importance of epistemology (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1998). More specifically, within the local context of reductionist public representations (particularly those circulated by government and media) I epistemologically privileged the peasant workers' narratives. This enabled me to make a fundamental break with my original research problem. The research moved beyond an investigation reproducing a research question generated by government and academic elites, to a critical exploration generating new knowledge that illustrated multi-layered narratives of the constrained conditions in which the migrant rural men produced a diverse range of creative responses to living and working in the city. In so doing, I shifted from an overly structuralist perspective on Chinese (male) peasant workers' lives, to an investigation of the interplay between structure and agency in producing a broader understanding of their subjectivity and identity formation. In turn, this was of importance in enabling my research question to critically engage with current debates on neoliberal modernization.

The Chapters in the Thesis

In order to produce a systematic account of male peasant workers' identity formation within an historical context of Chinese rural-urban labour migration, this thesis consists of two sections. Section I addresses the theoretical and methodological framework of the study. The thesis begins with a critical discussion in **Chapter One** about current debates on the Chinese modernization process since the late 1970s. It draws upon a range of sources

to focus on concepts including: Chinese modernization, modernity, Chineseness and the formation of social class. Located within the context of social, cultural and economic changes resulting from modernization, the chapter argues for the importance of seeing local accounts as a valuable resource to contest dominant understandings of contemporary transformations. The chapter critically explores the current dominant discourse of modernization and the formation of class that frames public representations (government and media) of Chinese rural-urban labour migration. Given the rapidly changing socio-economic conditions within contemporary society, it is argued that it is important to understand Chinese peasant workers' self-narratives about the impact of the modernization project on their lives and their creative responses to life in the city.

In order to develop a theoretical framework for this study, **Chapter Two** critically explores main bodies of work in the field of inquiry including: Chinese literature on rural-urban labour migration, Chinese feminist scholarship on female peasant workers, western research on men, masculinities and identity and new British feminist cultural studies scholarship. I explore traditional sociological understandings of rural-urban labour migration with a shift from exclusion/discrimination to integration/recognition and important emerging questions about class stratification. The chapter addresses the limitations of the current literature in this field of inquiry, exploring the important contribution of Chinese feminist scholarship that examines the gendering of migration and identity formation among the new worker-subject, 'Dagong Mei' (working girls or female migrant workers). In response to the absence of male peasant workers as gendered within the above literature, the chapter engages with (mainly) western scholarship that explicitly theorises men and masculinities. Of particular importance is new British feminist

scholarship, with its sophisticated rethinking of culturally-based class/gender dynamics in women's lives. Building on this work, I argue that there is a need to examine male peasant workers' identity formation through a critical investigation of the substantive issues of gender and class (intersectionality). In short, a range of literatures have enabled me to critically address the men's multi-layered narratives that serve to challenge the reductionist dominant public definitions of peasant workers.

Chapter Three sets out two main inter-connecting purposes. Firstly, the location of the research project within a post-positivist methodological tradition deploying a critical perspective to address the objectives of the research. Secondly, there is a detailed exploration of the research design, data collection and how the research was carried out. Based on my interpretivist ontological and epistemological position, the chapter highlights how my theoretical framework draws upon a British Cultural Studies critical approach to representation and a new feminist Bourdieusian approach to understanding the interrelation between structure and agency in the intersection of gender and class. The chapter engages with questions of the autonomous validity of methodology in reformulating the research question, the centrality of reflexivity and the complexity of implementing a western research ethical code in 'non-western' societies. It also highlights the interplay between theory, methods and data in the research process, aiming to produce responsible knowledge of Chinese male peasant workers' urban lives.

Based on the above analytical framework, the thesis moves onto Section II, from a theoretical discussion to theory-led empirical data analysis. Located within the specific juncture of modernization, **Chapter Four** critically examines the public gaze and the cultural production of masculinities. It historically traces the discursive formation of

peasant workers from the pre-reform to the post-Mao reform period. It explores shifting and contradictory representations of Chinese (male) peasant workers within public narratives - government, media and art - in order to problematize their portrayal that circulate across public arenas. Such representations are important in contextualizing rural-urban migrating masculinities projected as ‘dysfunctional others’. Within this context of dominant public representations, the chapter also addresses urban residents’ perspectives of male peasant workers. Importantly, the chapter explores this public gaze from various sources highlighting the need to address the unequal power relations operating upon the rural men within their urban encounters. There is a focus on the intersectionality of categories, including gender, class and ethnicity that enables us to examine the feminization and racialization of the migrant working class men. At the same time, it examines how dominant public understandings of these men contribute to their social stratification, including their social positioning in terms of what the peasant workers are perceived to lack within the dominant discourse of post-Mao modernization.

The thesis moves on to look at the formation of male subjective identities in **Chapter Five**. Migrating from rural villages to the city means male peasant workers are physically dislocated *from* their homes, where gender roles and responsibilities are precisely prescribed, *to* a modern urban space where gender practices and responsibilities have to be negotiated without the physical presence of one’s partner and extended family. Chapter Five investigates the male peasant workers’ own narratives in terms of their experience of rural-urban labour migration in relation to the ‘private domain’ of family life in the construction of their masculine subjectivities and identities. It argues that the formation of their migrating masculine subjectivities and identities is constructed through the

interrelation between traditional embedded familial gender norms and practices, as well as through their urban experiences of and encounters with rural-urban labour migration. The chapter argues that filial responsibility and other traditional gendered familial practices emanating from Confucian gender norms that are embodied within male peasant workers' cultural habitus have become an important resource for them to creatively make sense of their urban masculine identity as husbands/partners, fathers and sons, as they reinvent themselves in the city. This argument, based on the men's self-representations, serves to critique the reductionist dominant public representations outlined in Chapter Four.

Chapter Six draws on empirical data from life histories and participant observation to critically examine male peasant workers' urban experiences, focusing on how they negotiated and constructed their masculine subjective identities within the 'public domain' of the urban workplace. There is a specific exploration of non-conventional male occupations, such as service and light industrial work due to the geographical location of the research. This provides alternative accounts to the conventional gendered representations of male peasant workers' occupations, as construction workers and miners. Here, the men are seen deploying a range of strategies in negotiating their masculine subjectivities. It is argued that symbolically and materially Confucian 'father-son' relations are an important resource for the male peasant workers to creatively engage with the social relations of the urban workplace and to (re)construct their masculine identity through social interaction at work. There is a specific focus on how the men make sense of their new working lives through the construction of occupationally-based non-kin familial relations.

The **Conclusion** summarises the main arguments and findings of the research and suggests future research themes in this field of analysis in relation to the questions that have been addressed in the thesis.

Chapter One

Locating in Contemporary China: Transformation and Discussion

1.1 Introduction

1.2 All Start from Here: The Pursuit of Modernization in China

1.3 Post-Mao Modernization: from the Spiritual to the Material

1.4 Chinese Modernization under the Western Gaze

1.5 Exploring and Contesting Modernization in Post-Mao China

1.5:1 The emergence of Chinese neoliberal modernization

1.5:2 Chinese neoliberal modernization and its critiques

1.5:3 Local experience and cultural practices as critique of neoliberal modernization

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1.1 Introduction

China's economic success since the late 1970s is seen as a significant landmark in its pursuit of modernization in terms of progress and development. A key contribution to this shift was the introduction of economic reform and the accompanying neoliberal market economy, commonly represented through the post-Mao modernization project in terms of opening up market oriented economic and development policy, launched by Deng Xiaoping. There is much intellectual debate around how economic development provides new social and cultural conditions for contemporary China and its impact on Chinese society and the power of the communist party. The main purpose of this chapter is to explore this unique structural formation of contemporary Chinese society within this historical juncture in which this study is located. There are two objectives in the chapter. First, it provides a historical background to current social and cultural conditions in contemporary Chinese society. Second, by paying special attention to the discussion of the issue of modernity in the Chinese modernization process, the chapter critically explores the current dominant discourse of modernization and the formation of class. Of particular significance is the way this discourse frames public representations and narratives of Chinese rural-urban labour migration (see chapter 4). I argue for the importance of integrating the local experience of peasant workers into a discussion of Chinese modernity and modernization in this particular historical setting.

1.2 All Starts from Here: The Pursuit of Modernization in China

Modernization is one of the most important concepts in Chinese history which political leaders and academic elites have been dedicated to pursuing for centuries. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the discourse of western modernity was introduced

into China alongside the invasion of western imperial forces. While western imperialists were materially exploiting the old dynasty, including signing a number of unequal treaties with the Chinese authorities, they also introduced into this old empire the western notion of modernity with advanced technology and scientific thinking. Western modernity was perceived by some Chinese officials and intellectuals in positive terms as an important resource for the nation's own modernization. Since the May 4th movement in 1919, Chinese people, particularly young elite intellectuals and politicians discussed what China could learn from the western enlightenment. Critiques of Chinese tradition and established beliefs were overwhelming. Confucianism in particular became a target for Chinese intellectual criticism to justify the appropriation of adapting the advanced western model of modernity in terms of liberty and democracy into China. Modernization is usually associated with development and progress, aiming to 'meet the west' or to 'catch up with the west'. Chinese modernization history can also be seen as part of western colonization history. Within the global context, an uneven world order historically enabled western modernization, initially in Western Europe, to be seen as the default model for non-western countries to pursue. Paul Gilroy (1993) criticizes the universality of Eurocentric modernity, arguing for a notion of modernities in non-western societies. For Lingna Nafafé (2007), in his study of the early colonial history between Europe and West Africa, activities carried between them should be seen as equal involving cultural exchange. Similar notions include second modernity (Beck and Lao, 2005), multiple modernities (Eisenstadt, 1999), alternative modernity (Ong, 1997) or 'other modernities' (Rofel, 1999). For theorists such as Gilroy (1993), traditional societies such as those within Africa have already experienced modernity and civilization before the introduction of the western model. This chapter does not set out to trace in detail the history of Chinese modernization since the twentieth century,

which has already been well documented (see Rofel, 1999; Dirlik, 1989). However, this chapter adopts an historical perspective with a critical review of the transformation of the Chinese socialist modernization project since late 1970s and early 1980s and the emergence of social and cultural changes facilitated by a socialist market economy. It also aims to provide a socioeconomic and historical background within which this study is located, seeking to problematize the issue of Chinese neoliberal modernization and its related issue of class formation currently discussed within the academy. Importantly, it is argued that an exploration of peasant workers' migration will provide a lens through which to problematize the modernization project and to enable a more comprehensive and critical understanding of modernity and the formation of contemporary Chinese society in 'new times'.

1.3 Post-Mao Modernization: from the Spiritual to the Material

In more recent Chinese history, the socialist revolution in terms of the nation-building of the People's Republic of China is seen as one of the major modernization projects in Chinese history in the twentieth century. It was also accompanied by establishing modernity with 'Chinese characteristics', while deploying Marxist-Leninist communist ideology, commonly understood as 'Mao Zedong Thought' or 'Mao's Marxism' (Schwartz, 1965; Knight, 1986). Founded in 1949 by Mao Zedong, a Marxist revolutionary leader, the new China aimed to build an independent country that would challenge western power (Dirlik, 1983) and most importantly, internally, to overthrow the 'three mountains'¹ on Chinese people's back and 'class antagonism' (Renwick and

¹ The three mountains on the back of Chinese people included 'imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic-capitalism.' (Renwick and Cao, 1999:122)

Cao, 1999:123). One of the main ideologies in this new founded socialist state was anti-imperialism, anti-feudalism and anti-capitalism which positioned new China as a more advanced nation state to her counterparts in Europe (Dirlik, 1989). Socialist new China was dedicated to building an ideal society with equal opportunity and distribution, while at the same time by-passing the stage of primitive capital accumulation. Mao's idea of communism was that the Chinese economy was centrally-planned and under the administration of the Chinese Communist Party. Chinese people's lives were regulated by the central communist government and materials were equally distributed to its people under the one-party administration. However, as a result of: inefficient production, an uncompetitive economy, plus the great famine² between the late 1950s and 1960s, followed by the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s-1970s, China's economy remained depressed and a large proportion of the population continued to live in poverty. Meanwhile, the Chinese socialist revolution was also seen as an alternative modernity to the western capitalist modernity (Liu, 1996:198), with the former emphasising a spiritual cultural revolution, even though the 'reality' of poverty was evident across the country on a large scale.

The 1970s is an important decade in modern Chinese history, which marked the end of the Cultural Revolution. It was also the end of an era with the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the beginning of a new era represented by Deng's return to the Chinese political arena as the successor with his new economic policy of 'reform and opening up' of society in 1978. However, historically, this was not just a political transformation from one leader to another, but also a social, cultural and ideological transformation for a socialist new China, moving gradually away from Mao's centrally planned economy

² Yao (1999:1366-67) notes six causal factors of China's famine in 1959 to 1961: poor weather, wrong policies, low production incentives, the near absence of a statistical and monitoring system, the inability to import grain and international isolation.

to a market economy. Given the economically successful examples of its neighbours within the region, including Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, plus the reality of large scale internal poverty, Deng's policy highlighted that it was initially important to achieve primitive capital accumulation and economic growth. This would enable all Chinese people to gain 'xiaokang'³ (literally meaning a little prosperity, well-off); the aim of socialism which provides an ideal society for people where everyone is equal with common prosperity. The launch of Deng Xiaoping's modernization project shifts economic reform and encourages an open market and competition in order to achieve economic growth and efficiency. Chinese sociologists call this transformation the 'social transition'⁴. A major difference between Mao's and Deng's theory of modernization was the latter's adoption of a market oriented economy and the integration of Chinese society, culture and economy into the global capitalist system (Wang, 2003:152).

Within the discourse of this new socialist modernization⁵, the Chinese government prioritized its economic development by opening its socialist market to the outside world, attracting foreign direct investment, setting up special economic zones in the coast line cities with distinctive tax and economic policy, encouraging private businesses and stimulating competition in the market in order to boost economic growth. In response to an internal critique of his abandoning Mao's anti-capitalist ideology and his market economy concept, Deng's famous aphorism, 'as long as it catches the mice,

³ 'Xiaokang' is a slogan proposed by Deng, which foresees 'an ideal society that provides well being for all its citizen'. (Harvey, 2005:120)

⁴ According to Li's (2004b: i) definition, 'social transition' refers to the transformation from a traditional society to a modern society, including shifting from an agricultural society to an industrial society, from a closed society to an open society. Located specifically in contemporary China, it is a transformation from a planned economy society to market economy society. Such a social transition is an important representation of China's modernization.

⁵ Deng proposed four elements of modernization: agriculture, industry, education, and science and defence (Harvey, 2005:120)

it is a good cat whether it is black or white (不管白猫黑猫，抓得到老鼠的就是好猫)’ captures the new ideology in new times. This metaphorically represents the Chinese developmental strategy since the late 1970s by embracing capitalism into socialist China for the purpose of economic growth and the wellbeing of society. Deng modified his socialist theory as ‘Socialism with Chinese Characteristics’ in order to sustain the socialist ideology of common prosperity. Liu (2004:46) sees this as a revolt against the Maoist ideology and ‘a return to material base and material production as the foundation of socialism’. The difference between Deng’s modernization theory and western societies is that its market economy is under central control, which marks China’s entry into a new historical setting.

At the same time, Deng’s liberal economic policy prioritized certain regions, mainly in the south east, to take the lead in achieving economic development. He justified this uneven regional development in terms of ‘allow some people to get rich first and ultimately there will be common prosperity’ (允许一部分人先富起来最终达到共同富裕) (see Fan 2006), which has helped to change Chinese people’s understanding of modernization from revolution and class struggle in the Mao period to economic development and growth in the post-Mao period.

Meanwhile, it also changes the ideology of this socialist country from a preoccupation with a spiritual position that was highly advocated by Mao to a more material orientated position, although the government always encompasses both in its policy making. The modernization process in the past thirty years witnessed unprecedented social and economic changes with the emergence of the western capitalist market economy in China enabling its integration into the world order. China started to ‘progress’ from a traditional agrarian nation to a modern industrial nation with its market-oriented

economy. Featherstone (1995:87) maintains that ‘the move from traditional to modern societies was seen as accountable in terms of a range of specific processes: industrialization, urbanization, commodification, rationalization, differentiation, bureaucratization, the expansion of the division of labour, the growth of individualism and state formation processes.’ All these characteristics of modernization have been taking place in the last 30 years in China. At the same time, they have also gradually changed the image of China from an isolated obscure country to an open and internationally recognized society in the global capitalist community (Dirlik, 2003, 2004), aiming for progress and development.

1.4 Chinese Modernization under the Western Gaze

‘China overtook Germany to become the world's third largest economy yesterday after revising its figures for output growth. The Chinese economy has grown tenfold in three decades and grew 13% rather than 12% in 2007, Beijing said, putting it behind only the United States and Japan in terms of gross domestic product.’ (Guardian, 14-01-2009: China becomes World’s Third Largest Economy)⁶

‘...As China's size within the world economy grows, so will its influence, in the way that its domestic economic decisions affect the rest of the world economy...’ (BBC, 13-12-2001: China—an economic superpower?)⁷

‘...Fireworks, athletes and pageantry on a scale never before seen in the Olympics opened the Summer Games in Beijing on Friday as the Asian nation kicked off the biggest and most scrutinized games in history.’ (CNN.COM, 09-08-2008:Emotion kicks off China’ Olympics)⁸

Unprecedented increasing economic and political power as well as a world-shaking changing image of China represented in new media technologies has placed it under the

⁶ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2009/jan/14/china-world-economic-growth> (accessed 16-08-09)

⁷ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/1708454.stm> (accessed on 16-08-09)

⁸ <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/08/08/olympics.opening/index.html> (accessed on 01-09-08)

spotlight of the global community as the fastest growing economy in the world with double growth figures for nearly two decades⁹. As I noted previously, alongside Chinese modernization and its economic integration into the global capitalist system, the issue of globalization has also been unfolding with the discussion of the relation of China to the rest of the world (Liu, 2004). Many Chinese intellectuals see the integration into the world system as a globalization process that is compatible with the Confucian idea of ‘Tianxia’ (Zhao, 2006), that all nations live under heaven harmoniously, with people living in an world society rather than nation-states. In contrast, some western radical perspectives see it is an opportunity for China to build up and expand Chinese nationalism and its potential power and threat to conquer the world in the age of globalization¹⁰. An alternative to the above accounts is offered by Huntington’s (1996) ‘The Clash of Civilization?’, in which he argues for the notion of multiple modernities in an age of globalization. He maintains that modernization does not only enhance material conditions of different civilizations in the world, but also enhances the significance of its moral and cultural dimensions which create new power relations replacing those of the old world order of western societies.

Currently, many western economic and political observers are extremely anxious about the end of the Western world order, particularly under the leadership of the United States, and its replacement by the emerging power of China, and other developing countries with great histories and civilizations. They see the emergence of China’s rising power gained from its modernization project in terms of economic, military and

⁹ Khan and Riskin (2001:3) note that the average annual rate of growth of China’s GDP was 10.2% in the 1980s and 12.8% during the first half of the 1990s.

¹⁰ Globalization can be understood as a process towards an internationally integrated world and a homogeneous world society (Hirst and Thompson, 1996:4) that includes the modernization of third world societies and their participation in the world community.

political developments, as a threat to their hegemonic position in the world order. For example, in terms of military power, a western commentator (cited by Roy, 1996:759) demonizes China as a 'bully' that will expand its power in the global order. Other texts in recent years have celebrated the emerging Chinese economy, while expressing their concerns about its threat and the end of the western hegemony. However, some writers see the projection of China's rising power as a myth and are pessimistic about China's modernization. For example, Gordon Chang's (2001) *The Coming Collapse of China*, sees a 'weak' China beneath the apparent stunning surface. While other radical perspectives, such as Martin Jacques's (2009) *When China Rules the World: The Rise of the Middle kingdom and the End of the Western World* and James Kynge's (2007) *China Shakes The World: The Rise of a Hungry Nation* have produced positive representations of China as a superpower in the new world order.

Globalization and the market economy enable China to gain access to the global market, to erase its 'luohou' (backward) history, and to build up an advanced nation state similar to western developed countries. Indeed, China's rapid transformation has narrowed the gap with the western world through impressive economic development and other social and cultural spectacles, such as the 'Beijing Olympics' in 2008 and 'Expo Shanghai' in 2010. Communication in terms of social, cultural and economic encounters have been opened up within the global community that generates many similarities between China and the west in terms of a model of development. Modernity¹¹ and globalization cannot be separated since a consequence of western

¹¹ The discourse of modernity is a historical and cultural product associated with the western project of the 'enlightenment'. Partly due to the development of colonialism and imperialism by European countries, modernity has been universally dispersed and has had a profound impact locally on a wide range of societies across the world. Giddens (1990:1) defines 'modernity' as referring 'to modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence'. It is a landmark opposed to 'tradition' that signifies the transformation from superstition and backwardness to a scientific approach and progression.

colonial history is that it has enabled the western version of modernity to be universally recognized. I believe that it is the similarities of development that worry western societies about the threat of China's emergence and the spread of Chinese modernization that challenges their hegemonic position in the age of globalization. Within the discourse of globalization, which is defined by Giddens (1990:64), 'as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa', it is rather easy to draw contradictory conclusions, such as the threat of Chinese nationalism with the emergence of the Chineseness, China's westernization¹² or China as a hybrid nation embracing global information and exchange with its own culture. One's conclusion depends on whether one either emphasizes the internal power of Chinese culture for the hegemonic force of Chinese nationalism or the external force of western culture and its impact on Chinese society in the process of globalization. For Robertson (1995:26-27), Giddens's account of globalization in terms of an 'action-reaction' relationship between the local and the global does not fully capture the complex interrelationship between the two.

For example, the material reality in contemporary China is more complex and cannot simply be read off by such western/Chinese or global/Chinese dichotomies within the discourse of globalization, as the division is conditional and blurred. And more importantly, the relations between the local and the global are dialectically interconnected and integrated. Such a complex reality also raises discussions about China's entry into postmodernity (Dirlik and Zhang, 2000) with the emerging conditions of social economic change, an increasing western style consumerism and

¹² Zheng (1999:48) maintains that 'it is hard to say whether China's modernization in the post-Mao era was characterized by westernization. As a matter of fact, "westernization" has been a cultural construct created by Chinese nationalists in their efforts to search for a new cultural and national identity.'

diverse popular cultures, alongside the local Chinese culture. Dirlik and Zhang (2000) highlight the complex changes and intercommunication between China and the global economy:

‘On the one hand, it exposes the Chinese market and the realm of daily life to global capital and to international fashions and ideologies...On the other hand, the world market’s spread into China, and China’s willing entry into it, enables Chinese consumers to encounter a world of difference, unevenness, inequality, and hierarchy, often delineated in terms of nation-state borders’ (Dirlik and Zhang, 2000:6).

A focus on globalization has led to increasing discussion about the progress of the neoliberal modernization project currently operating within China.

1.5 Exploring and Contesting Modernization in Post-Mao China

China’s current market economy, or neoliberal modernization project is recognized by some modernist scholars as a westernization or capitalization process (Guthrie, 2008), as its market economy corresponds with the development of western capitalist societies in contributing to the global capitalist economy. However, within the ‘socialist market economy’ launched by Deng Xiaoping, there are various internal tensions and conflicts, since the capitalist market economy operates alongside another element of the modernization project, that of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Within this context, China’s path to modernization and the issue of modernity have been highly contested, experiencing controversies from the introduction of economic reform in the late 1970s, especially around the emerging neoliberal¹³ model of development and its

¹³ Harvey’s (2005:2) defines neoliberalism as a theory of political economic practice, which ‘proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.’

coexistence with a socialist national identity of anti-capitalism. Ong (1997) maintains that China encounters a crisis of cultural identity with its integration into the global market and the influence of capitalism in this socialist state. While western societies are conscious of the emergence of China's rising power in the international arena as a threat to their hegemonic position, there appears to be little awareness or a deliberate attempt to ignore that China's current modernization project is never as smooth as it seems to be through simply concentrating on its highly visible rapid economic growth. Internal explorations of and debates about a suitable modernization model for China are ongoing within the new socialist market economy, in terms of evaluating and justifying its adoption of western liberalism of the free market in relation to an understanding of Chinese modernity.

1.5:1 The emergence of Chinese neoliberal modernization

Chinese neoliberal modernization has been theoretically supported from the beginning of the transition period from a planned economy to a market oriented economy. Intellectual discussions exploring and explaining the transformations that have taken place in Chinese society have attempted to provide theoretical frameworks for the building of a modernized society by embracing western modernization theory and promoting the importance of primitive capital accumulation before achieving the ultimate socialist aim of common prosperity. Thinking of the relation between western modernity and Chinese culture dominated that period. There were nationalists who supported the idea of localism as a rejection of western capitalist modernization. In contrast the New Enlightenment Movement in 1980s was a group of intellectuals who supported the liberalization of the economy. Wang (2003:144) maintains that the

intellectuals' reflections on modernization during 1980s 'was on the one hand a search for wealth and power along the path to the establishment of a modern nation-state; on the other hand, it was a process of re-evaluating their society and tradition against the yardsticks of Western society and its cultures and values.' During the post-Mao economic reform period, this movement advocated the need to absorb western enlightenment philosophy into China and tried to build up the ideological foundation for China to pursue the path of western neoliberal modernization in order to catch up with the west. One of their main tasks was to critically confront and abandon the old beliefs, such as the pre-reform Mao's anti-capitalist communist revolutionary ideology. Rather they promoted a New Chinese Socialist Ideology by encouraging a capitalist developing model of a free market and engagement between western liberal thinking and Chinese political and intellectual elites. These pro-western intellectuals developed within socialist China new western ideas such as liberalism and democracy, which were regarded as a standard model for development, corresponding with the government's intention of building a socialist market economy and an ideal modernized society, similar to that of the United States and other western developed countries.

Intellectuals in this new enlightenment movement later became a think tank and the theoretical base for the Chinese government's neoliberal model of modernization. They also argued for the government to shift its focus away from the development of rural areas. This rural development was initially at the center of the policy to improve rural living and production standards in the first half of the 1980s. The new focus was to be on expanding the market economy by increasing businesses within the global economic system in selected urban areas, mainly in medium and large coastal cities in the south and provincial capital cities. However, this discussion among Chinese intellectuals was threatened with the outbreak of the *Tiananmen Square incident* in 1989, when Chinese

elite students asked for social justice and democracy in line with economic liberalization. At this time, economic liberalization thinking went into decline for a short period with an uncertain future.

1.5:2 Chinese neoliberal modernization and its critiques

Discussion about Chinese neoliberal modernization since 1990s continued to dominate Chinese intellectual life even though people started to doubt whether the market economy could survive and whether it was an appropriate model for China. However, after the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, economic development did not slow down because of this political interruption. Rather, after the southern economic success reaffirmed by Deng's 'South Tour'¹⁴ to the frontline of an economic developing region—Guangdong; and his famous slogan—'to get rich is glorious', the Fourteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China¹⁵ in 1992 declared the main task in the 90s was to achieve greater economic success by building on Deng's theory of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. Western neoliberal modernization became the official model of the nation's development and policy making. The neoliberalization of the socialist market economy in the era of globalization dramatically transformed society with increasing commercial activities, information and value exchange with the western world. Criticism of the 'neoliberal turn' developed to contest this western modernity model and its suitability within a Chinese context with the expansion of poverty and polarization between rich and poor and other social issues such as the

¹⁴ Deng's 'South Tour' in early 1992 was seen as a major gesture in defence of his market economy reform (Zhao, 1993).

¹⁵ <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90002/92169/92191/6274237.html> (access on 29-08-09)

environment. Evidence of the latter has been documented by economic and sociology scholars (see Khan and Riskin, 2001).

In relation to the question of the neoliberal free market and socialism, especially after the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, academic research started to address the emergence of neoliberalism with discussion of a 'new order' (Wang, 2003) in contemporary China. Such discussion did not only envisage incorporation of China into western neoliberalism but also raised questions about the consequences of a Chinese 'Anglo-Saxon Style' neoliberalism, critically addressing it with reference to the question of modernity discussed among China's 'new left' intellectuals, or 'critical intellectuals', such as Wang Hui (Wang, 1998, 2003, 2004, 2008). While witnessing the successful economic reform led by the government with unprecedented growth, Wang was critical of the pro-west New Enlightenment intellectuals in the 1980s, who combined criticism of Chinese socialism with welcoming western capitalism that developed into the formation of a neoliberal model of modernization. Wang (2003:148) argues that socialist Chinese modernization is different to others 'not only because the question of its modernization was posed by Marxists, but because Chinese Marxism itself is an ideology of modernization; not only was the goal of the Chinese socialist movement modernization but the movement itself constitutes the main characteristics of Chinese modernity.' The Chinese socialist movement is modernization with Chinese characteristics, which ideologically bye-passed the stage of primitive capital accumulation. He is sceptical about why such criticism towards Mao's socialism by these pro-west intellectuals does not lead to their reflection on the issue of modernity and the suitability of their adaption of a neoliberal model of modernization in a Chinese context. Therefore, from his point of view, the criticism of Chinese socialism should have entailed a critical perspective towards modernity, so that people could have a

comprehensive understanding and critical perspective about the western origins of neoliberalism.

Wang Hui (1998) admits that since the 1990s, the world order has changed from two worlds to a global capitalist world, even though the Chinese communist party is still in power and ideologically committed to socialism. He (Wang, 1998:9) argues that the current Chinese government ‘in all of its behaviours, including economic, political, and cultural—even in government behaviour—China has completely conformed to the dictates of capital and the activities of the market’ by embracing a western neoliberal model of modernization. However, Wang’s (2004: 56) critical perspective towards the western modernization model suggests that ‘European capitalism and its history of global expansion cannot become the standard against which China is measured; by the same token, these must become the object of our critique and rethinking.’ Meanwhile, Wang (2003) believes that contemporary China cannot simply be read off from the abstract dichotomies of: China/West, tradition/modernity, socialist/capitalist, as the situation in Chinese society is more complex in the current historical setting. His work has criticized China’s neoliberal thinking and policy-making by suggesting that a Chinese theory of modernization based on its historical experience should be produced in order to prevent China from being westernized or misled by western modernity, which as he maintains, cannot explain the specificity of the nation’s present and future needs. For him, simply adapting a western frame or relying on the explanation of pure Chineseness cannot provide a full picture of Chinese society, as they are interdependent and we cannot be certain that what historically happened in China did not happen in the west or vice versa.

Although his argument remains at a theoretical level without empirical evidence of the material reality of contemporary China, I found Wang’s (2008) philosophical

perspective is of particular value in terms of studying current Chinese society in a global context, and to critically understand the nation's current social and cultural conditions and the formation of Chinese modernity at this particular historical juncture.

He maintains that:

‘In my opinion, we should of course take into account the singularity of a given historical period or society as the object of our research and criticism of Western universalism. But at the level of philosophy, neither particularism nor universalism works well. This is because all the narratives of so-called particularism embody universalistic particularism, while all the narratives of so-called universalism embody particularistic universalism. These two narrative approaches appear to be diametrically opposed, but are actually interdependent.’ (Wang, 2008:136)

China may historically have had its own model of modernization (see Wang, 2008).

However, within the contemporary context of globalization, conclusions cannot be easily drawn that over-emphasizes national exceptionalism. Rather, discussion of a particular society and its modernity needs to be located within a global context, serving to highlight the interpenetrations between the local and the global, compatible to a critical understanding of both *local* experiences and *global* structures.

This is illustrated later in the thesis in Chapters Five and Six.

1.5:3 Local experience and cultural practices as critique of neoliberal modernization

Returning to the issue of neoliberal modernization within a globalization-based post-Mao economic reform period, the current Chinese modernization project in creating a socialist market economy has produced a new social structure and mobility. The nation is projected as an imaginary space aiming to progress through capitalization and neoliberal economic practices. However, empirically, what is the implication of this neoliberal modernization for local Chinese people and their response to western

modernity and the global development trend? More specifically, its consequence of uneven geographical development and creation of conditions for class formation (see Harvey, 2005) has become a central critique to question its viability in socialist China. However, Nonini (2008:145) questions whether neoliberalism is occurring in China. He argues that Chinese neoliberalism is incomplete as it exists only for the new form of cadre-capitalist class and they are not entirely incorporated into neoliberalism in practice. He has a similar understanding with his Chinese counterparts on the issue of the social transformation since post-Mao's liberal economic reform in terms of the formation of class as a result of neoliberalism: 'a new cadre-capitalist class has emerged during liberalization, while large numbers of farmers, urban workers and a "floating population" of urban migrants have been dispossessed of land, employment and political rights.'

Nonini (2008:146-147) argues that 'it may make sense to speak of the prevalence of "neoliberal" ideology among certain privileged urban residents of China, and specific leaders and factions of reformers within the CPC (The Communist Party of China).'

However, he is sceptical whether 'the Chinese population has widely incorporated neoliberal subjectivities and practices' (ibid.: 147). He maintains that plural histories of neoliberalism and scepticism about the power of the western notion of neoliberalism are taking place through local cultural practices. Located within a Chinese context, he uses 'Guanxi'¹⁶ as an example to illustrate that the socialist market economy is operating under these interpersonal relations among the cadre-capitalist class. This challenges the essential characteristics of the neoliberal logic of a free market, since government cadre and the capitalist are mutually dependent on each other to rationalize their daily

¹⁶ Guanxi (Nonini, 2008; Yan, 1996; Yang, 1994) is defined as a personal relationship or network which is built on pre-existing social connections and contacts in terms of friendship, classmates and relatives. It is preserved and renewed by giving gifts, favours and banquets.

practices and to sustain their interests. Nonini (2008:146) suggests that ‘in considering whether and to what extent the Chinese population “buys into” market logics of thinking and acting, one must take into account the sheer diversity of class (and class-associated traits such as educational, and urban vs. rural) backgrounds in China, the discursive formation that exists in China today (Maoist, Confucianist, Daoist, Buddhist, etc.) as alternatives to a ruling market logic, and the presence of large-scale protests exhibiting widely held moral economies that draw on socialist values to make claims on the reformist state.’

With respect to the Chinese New Left’s discussion of Chinese modernity, Nonini’s perspective about the uncompleted neoliberalism in China challenges the notion of the ‘universalization of neoliberalism’ (Harvey, 2005), which also indicates that there is a unique understanding of modernity and a proactive modernization among Chinese people, which is different to the state’s neoliberal model of modernization initiated by western style modernity. The local cadre-capitalists’ ‘guanxi’ relations and practices for example, can be seen as resistance or as an alternative¹⁷ to western neoliberal modernity, which blur the boundaries between ‘what is state and public, and what is market and private’ (Nonini, 2008:161) that should be clearly defined in neoliberal conditions. In this case, we can see that neoliberal modernization does not erase local cultural practices such as ‘Guanxi’, but enables neoliberalism to function in the Chinese context in its own way for the cadre-capitalist class, while at the same time, excluding those people (such as workers and peasants) outside the network to ‘buy into’ neoliberalism in China (Nonini, 2008:163) (I will return to this later in the Chapter). What Nonini’s (2008) example of ‘Guanxi’ suggests is that a capitalist market economy gives rise to

¹⁷ Ong (1997:172-173) maintains that ‘alternative visions of modernity may exist within a single country or a single region of the world; their configurations are to a large extent conditioned by geopolitics and the dynamism of global capitalism.’

traditional interpersonal relations continuing to be important in the formation of Chinese modernity through local experience. In response to the relationship between the local and the global, Nonini's accounts in terms of Chinese local responses to the neoliberal modernization illustrates what Robertson (1995) and other non-western scholars (see Ohnuki-Tierney, 2006) maintain about the continuity of the past and the mutual interconnection between the local and the global across time and space.

Current practices of the new cadre-capitalist class are a product of Chinese neoliberal modernization, which comprises of local cultural practices, such as the cadre-capitalist guanxi network. We can see this guanxi network as the continuity of Chinese culture, across different historical periods of the modernization process from 'old times' as well as an expression of local modernity and a dimension of global modernity in 'new times' in the age of globalization. Featherstone (1995) maintains that,

‘The sense that there are plural histories to the world, that there are diverse cultures and particularities which were excluded from Western modernity's universalistic project, but now surface to the extent that they cast doubts on the viability of the project, is one particular outcome of the current phase of the process of globalization.’ (Featherstone, 1995:89)

He also criticizes the generalization of universal modernity under the scheme of globalization and claims that it does not produce a unified culture but rather enables us to be aware of the diversity of cultures through local practices. Featherstone (1995) argues that,

‘If there is a global culture it would be better to conceive of it not as a common culture, but as a field in which differences, power struggles and cultural prestige contests are played out.’ (Featherstone 1995:13-14)

It is argued in this thesis that these differences, power struggles and prestige contests are not only played out among nation states but also within them. Chapter 5 and 6 illustrate the centrality of local traditional practices, such as the guanxi network, in

peasant workers' construction of 'modern' identities within the family and the workplace.

1.6 Rural Chinese People in the Socialist Market Economy

Socialist state power while changing Chinese society and people's material lives has also set up a particular discourse for the nation to imagine what it means by modernization. Coulter (2003) shows this to be a wider phenomenon for under-developed states seeking modernization. Economic transformations are accompanied by fundamental ideological shifts in tradition, culture and values.

“Modernization would inevitably entail the installation of those institutions and processes deemed conducive to capitalist accumulation. In particular, existing forms of social interaction and regulation would have to be replaced with those of the free market. The drive to modernity would require not only systematic structural reform but radical cultural change as well. Modernization theorists contested that if under-developed states were ever to evolve to the level of the west, they would have to dispense with customary ways of thinking and being. In more specific terms, people living in these societies would have to nurture those narrowly rational approaches to work and consumption that one figure within the modernization school famously characterized as the ‘need to achieve’.” (Coulter, 2003:5)

However, such understanding of the process of modernization is idealistic as, on the one hand, it rationalizes a western style of development as a default model; on the other hand, it is simplistic in not acknowledging the local struggles in achieving such objectives with their own histories. For example, with reference to China, there are specific challenges and controversies in the transformation from the old isolated socialist society to one characterized as a socialist market economy aiming to get rich. This is accompanied by disparities between regions, groups and individuals with social inequality and uneven distribution caused by neoliberal economic reform, as well as the

continuity of socialist ideology from an earlier period. In this transformation, certain people may be seen as being involved in the process of progress as the objective of modernization, while other people may be seen as backward, as losers in terms of the uneven distribution within the same socioeconomic and material structure. This might also become the material base to contest a western style of modernization and its universality. In other words, modernization may be manipulated by particular powerful classes, represented by the urban elites which are privileged in China's development strategies against particular disadvantaged 'classes' and collectivities, represented by the rural population in current official discourses of modernization.

1.6:1 The Socialist market economy and the transformation of 'class'

Economic prosperity, science, technological development and international political impact all speak of the success of Chinese socialist neoliberal modernization in the past 30 years. However, alongside the national specificity of the success of socialist economic reform or 'neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics' policy-making (Harvey, 2005:120), there are also a series of institutional and structural changes within Chinese society sharing a similar trajectory to other neoliberal societies. These include: an uneven regional development strategy, the redistribution of capital under the control of central government and other extended social issues, as a result of capitalization, such as income inequality (Knight and Song, 1999; Wu, 2004) and social stratification (Nee, 1991, 1996; Bian and Logan, 1996) with the expansion of the market economy. As rapid economic growth continues, tensions start to intensify between the principle of neoliberal modernization, represented by progress, wealth and fairness (the eleventh development objective of common prosperity between 2006-2010) (Fan, 2006), and the

material reality of social inequality, stratification, and wealth polarization that a socialist nation-state aims to go beyond, claiming to be superior to capitalist societies. Such controversies have become highly visible in Chinese society as a result of the socialist neoliberal modernization project.

Criticisms of the project, as I pointed out above, contest the western model of development as it causes social inequality and income polarity between regions and individuals. Economic reform and modernization are seen as having an impact beyond economic growth at a structural level that causes major changes that destabilize the old social order in Chinese society. In other words, a neoliberal style of economic development provides China not only with impressive figures of economic growth, but also a range of social issues that are currently differentially experienced by different classes. Of major significance, is the issue of social inequality between the regions. For example, rural-urban migration and peasant workers have been excluded from the neoliberal discourse of modernization, as the system favours the needs of the new cadre-capitalist class and their interpretation of neoliberal modernization.

However, under the impact of modernization, led by the Chinese communist party, the market and economic expansion, there emerges a new labour process and expanding demand for labour within the context of industrialization. These changing economic and political structures mean that the stable socialist social order and existing social divisions are challenged by this transformation process. For example, Pun and Chan (2008) have developed a genealogy of the working class in China. They argue that:

‘we observe a double alienation, if not trauma, of class formation in China: first, an articulation of “class” or “class struggle” from above in Maoist China, and second, an abrupt subsumption of “class” discourse in the reform period.’ (Pun and Chan, 2008:76).

Bian (2002) has highlighted the changing meanings of working class in different historical periods since the founding of new China in 1949, during which, peasant workers have emerged as a product of a fragmented working class within the historical transformation to Post-Mao economic reform.

‘Mao’s working class was officially and politically recognized as a “leading class”. Post-1978 market reforms eroded this status recognition and differentiated the working class into wage labour in the private sector, unprotected labour in the state sector, layoff labour wandering in search for a job, and deprived migrant peasant-labour.’ (Bian, 2002: 96)

Indeed, material conditions such as social inequality and uneven regional development in Chinese society challenge the utopian socialist market economy which aims to use the ‘invisible hand’ of the market to control society and to achieve common prosperity. There is continuity and discontinuity in this transformation for Chinese people. Social mobility is also facilitated within the neoliberal discourse, as the formation of internal migrant labour is the result of the neoliberal labour re-structuring. In the case of China, the neoliberal turn leads to the demand for cheap labour for its competitiveness within a market economy. China’s economic power in modernization is partly due to its labour-intensive manufacturing, which is constituted by thousands of peasant workers moving from rural agricultural sectors to urban industrial and manufacture sectors since the 1980s. Particularly important was China’s modernizing strategy shifting from the development of the rural to the urban and privileging southern and eastern cities of China as part of its uneven regional development plan.

Urban space has been an ‘imagined’ place of modernization which attracts thousands of rural dwellers ‘to look for their fortune’ as well as to supplement the labour market. Appadurai (1996) assumes that people can imagine so-called modern lives through media consumption and geographic mobility - migration. The 2000 Census reported

that there were about 121.07 million internal migrants up to the year 2000, among whom, 88.4 million were rural to urban migrants, which accounts for about 73 percent of the total volume. This amount has rapidly increased on a yearly basis. People tend to move from poor areas, located mainly in the north, west and inland regions to the better-off south, east and coastal areas. For example, coastal areas such as Guangdong, Shanghai, Zhejiang are the most economically developed regions and also the most popular destinations of rural migration. According to Deshingkar (2006), the official estimate of peasant workers is that it has increased from about 26 million in 1988 to 126 million in 2004 over the last decades. However, this number could be an under-estimate, as there is still a large number yet to register with the local authorities and there are a large number of about 200 million labourers who are potential migrants. According to a recent national statistical survey in China, there were 230 million peasant workers by the end of 2009, within which 65.1% were male, 34.9% were female¹⁸. Movement from agricultural to non-agricultural areas since 1978 is considered as being one of the most significant components of the current rapid pace of economic growth and modernization in China (Logan, 2002).

However, this trend of labour movement also creates a new ‘class system’ that has not yet been officially recognized by the Chinese government (Goodman, 1999, 2008). Harvey (2005:121-122) writes of local struggles in neo-liberal economic transformation: ‘for what the Chinese had to learn (and to some degree are still learning), among many other things, was that the market can do little to transform an economy without a parallel shift in class relations, private property, and all the other institutional arrangements that typically ground a thriving capitalist economy.’ This is also targeted

¹⁸ National Bureau of Statics of China (2009) *Research Report on Monitoring Peasant Workers 2009*. http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjfx/fxbg/t20100319_402628281.htm (accessed on 21-06-2010).

by its rival critics who argue that the neoliberal ideology is in the interest of specific social groups, so that not everyone can benefit from the market economy with its effect of social stratification and the formation of a new 'class', which is in contrast to the ideology of a socialist nation-state. In Harvey's words, this process of neo-liberal economic development and its consequences in terms of the restoration of class is 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey, 2005:159). In particular, the social and economic status of peasants has suffered dramatic changes in this transition. For example, Harvey (2005) notes that before Deng's economic reform in 1978, rural dwellers were seen as a privileged social class which was separated from the urban population by the household registration system. However, their status has been overshadowed by the neoliberal market economy and the policy of prioritizing urban regional development.

This uneven regional development, in particular, with reference to rural and urban areas has created a class society, made highly visible by rural-urban labour migration. Such recognition is rarely documented in public policy due to the sensitivity of the Chinese government to the notion of class since the period of Mao (Pun and Chan, 2008). Class recognition is not included in the government's neoliberal discourse, even though it is subsumed in political narratives in terms of the recognition of their subordinated circumstances in the modernization process. The neoliberal model of modernization creates a discourse with the effect of currently ending the 'privileged' position of the working class and the peasant class (Pun and Chan, 2008), while promoting the cadre-capitalist class in the new system. This 'class' system is not just about the nature of work, it is ideologically generated within a modernization discourse in terms of uneven regional development that socially places peasant workers in an inferior position, represented as of 'low quality (di suzhi)' (Anagnost, 2004:192). The accessibility of

capital for local Chinese people has been challenged due to the coexistence of the free market and central control. The success of the state's economic progress, as well as the emergence of new values in people's daily lives has changed local Chinese peoples' perspectives about themselves, their society, their culture and about how different classes see each other. However, X. Wang (2002:15) pointing to the paradoxical circumstances in China with the emergence of the new market economy suggests that: 'for the Communist Party it is a matter of principle, of its political survival as a party historically identified with socialism, that it cannot, or cannot afford to, draw on bourgeois values openly or on a significant scale'. Nevertheless, peasant workers are dislocated in the current socialist market economy, with major issues of identity formation for rural men living and working in the city. Chapters Five and Six will critically explore this identity formation within the context of the family and the workplace.

1.6:2 Peasant workers and contested Chinese modernization

Nonini (2008) argues that social groups, such as peasant workers, are excluded from the market economy system, due to their lack of resources to build up interpersonal relations that are required in gaining socioeconomic status. Hence, the pursuit of modernization may have led to a disconnection between the state and its people in terms of the implementation of modernizing ideology. In contrast to the success of the cadre-capitalist class, peasant workers are discursively portrayed as 'disadvantaged', particularly due to lack of education in terms of improving the 'quality' (*suzhi*) of their lives that would enable them to participate in the modernization project. *Suzhi*, according to Yan (2003:494),

‘refers to the somewhat ephemeral qualities of civility, self-discipline, and modernity...(suzhi) marks a sense and sensibility of the self’s value in the market economy... it is often used in the negative by the post-Mao state and educational elites to point to the lack of quality of the Chinese labouring masses. Improving the *suzhi* of China’s massive population has become vitally important in the planning of governing elites for China to become a competitive player in the field of global capital... a new ontological valuation and abstraction of human subjectivity through examining the linkages among poverty-relief campaigns, labour migration, and development’.

In the Chinese government’s current political discourse, the peasant workers’ inability to positively engage with the modernization project constitutes a major problem. How well the government’s modernization ideology penetrates into their daily practices is of importance in understanding and evaluating the project initiated by socialist China. Ong’s (1997:172) argument about alternative versions of modernities within a single country also indicates that if the cadre-capitalist class in neoliberal China has its own version of what constitutes modernity, then peasant workers may also have their own practices in pursuing their imagined modern lives. As Ong (1997:173) notes:

‘There are alternative¹⁹ modernities expressed by subalterns that are marginalized or even suppressed by the dominant forms.’

Modernization discourse since 1978 has provided an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983), offering Chinese people a sense of community and commitment, which has been captured by the national slogan to get rich and to make progress, while at the same time excluding particular social groups. However, Chinese peasants have been provided with two different definitions in two different periods of Chinese modernization: Mao’s anti-capitalism and Deng’s socialist market economy. It may be suggested that the category of class seems more appropriate than modernization to capture the experiences of

¹⁹ Alternative, as Ong (1997:194) defines it is ‘to refer to a dynamic that is oppositional to existing hegemonies, a counterforce arising from other sites that are not without their own particular mix of expansive and repressive technologies’.

peasant workers. For example, Thompson (1980) defines the formation of class in the following terms.

‘If we stop history at a given point, there are no classes but simply a multitude of individuals with a multitude of experiences. But if we watch these men over an adequate period of social change, we observe patterns in their relationships, their ideas, and their institutions. Class is defined by men as they live with their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition’ (Thompson, 1980:10).

A critical interrogation of Chinese modernization and modernity cannot be evaluated without referring to local ‘disadvantaged’ Chinese people’s accounts, since the aim of China’s neoliberal project is to provide a fair, harmonious society for all of its people.

While cultural globalization suggests the homogeneity of cultural practices, Chinese peasant workers who are experiencing dislocation may find it hard to identify and connect with the modernization project. At the same time, discussion of modernization and globalization seems to be an official discourse that makes sense of elite or middle class lifestyles, which results in the writing out of peasant workers from this projected homogenous process (Zhang, 2001). The contestation of modernity from these mobile people is of importance to understand China’s narratives of modernization and the uniqueness of its modernity at this historical juncture of rapid change. Dirlik and Zhang (1997) maintain that

‘Chinese states and populations are no longer merely the "objects" of forces emanating from Euro-America but are themselves significant contributors to the operations of capitalism; hence the seemingly contradictory representations of China and Chinese at once in conventional Orientalist (or self-Orientalist) terms as a location of the exotic other but also as the carriers of values expanding the frontiers of capitalism’ (Dirlik and Zhang, 1997:4).

In contrast to the visibility at a global level of changing images of China in the international community, there is little space to document at a local level Chinese people’s diverse narratives. More specifically, we need to create alternative spaces to

understand peasant workers' accommodation to and contestation of the new socialist modernization process, in response to the current discussion around modernity and neoliberal modernization, explored above. In particular, under the open-market mechanism, the demand for cheap labour attracts thousands of peasant workers. However, the importance of studying this mobile population is not only because they are categorized as 'poor' and 'disadvantaged' in the socialist market economy but also because they were a privileged class in pre-reform socialist China that currently still exists in government's communist ideology. Understanding, such a contradictory transformation, I believe, will provide an important resource to make sense of a range of meanings of China's path to modernization and the specificity of Chinese modernity emerging in this historical setting. Mac and Ghail and Haywood (2007:246) maintain the integral role of the personal in nation-making and economic modernization and that private experience is 'making visible its intimate relationship to that which continues to be redefined as its opposite, the public'. This is further explored in chapters 5 and 6.

Chinese policy-makers who assume that the modernization project will benefit all the population have not taken into account the complex processes of accommodation and struggle involved. It may be argued that Chinese peasant workers, as with the urban cadre-capitalist class, are undergoing their own modernization process in their own particular ways. If modernization means progress, that both Mao's socialist movement and Deng's socialist market economy promote, the transformation of Chinese peasants and workers, and the formation of peasant workers remain problematic with the move to post-Mao modernization. Peasant workers, who are undergoing the experience of 'cultural struggle' (Ong, 1991), remain under-represented within the new social structure. It is argued that peasant workers' engagement with the modernization project

is of central importance to current intellectual debates about modernity and modernization, to which my research project makes a contribution.

1.7 Conclusion

Transition from Mao's planned economy to the post-Mao socialist market economy has witnessed social and cultural changes along with unprecedented economic growth. This chapter has reviewed and provided a critical perspective of the cultural and social conditions of contemporary China within which this research project is located. There are particular social and cultural conditions in the constitution of the current stage of socialist modernization with its emphasis on primitive capital accumulation and its ideology of progress and development. The prioritization of capital has generated social inequality and stratification, manifest in the increasing polarity between the rich and the poor. Such polarization has greatly increased with specific social groups within particular regions being empowered as a result of post-Mao development policy. However, at the same time, such new social structures have also created tensions and contradictions, such as the position of peasant workers, who have been dislocated from a privileged social and political class during the Mao period to the one that is materially recognized as a disadvantaged group.

Changing social and cultural conditions also raises discussion, among intellectuals inside and outside the society, about modernity in China from an earlier period to the present neoliberal modernization in the age of globalization. This research project will generally address the issue of modernity by documenting peasant workers' narratives, particularly the issue of identity formation, in response to the public discourse of modernization and development. Chinese people are experiencing transformations in

their everyday lives and identity formations in the pursuit of neoliberal modernization. However, continuities and discontinuities accompany these changes. For example, evidence from the elite cadre capitalist class (Nonini, 2008) suggests that their practices challenge the western notion of neoliberal market economy, as traditional ‘guanxi’ connections continue to make sense of the formation of Chinese modernity for this privileged social group.

Chinese peasant workers were projected as a major social problem in the modernization project at the Fifteenth National Congress of the Communist Party to the Sixteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China programmes - the building of ‘Socialist Harmonious Society’²⁰. Its primary focus was on disadvantaged groups and government officials and academics acknowledged the significant role of peasant workers in China’s modernization. In terms of political visibility, it is a good sign for peasant workers who currently experience high levels of social inequality that the government is beginning to address their needs. However, such policy making cannot be successful unless peasant workers are provided with the material conditions in which to make sense of their position and respond to the national discourse of modernization and development. Current discussions of Chinese modernity and modernization are constructed by the narratives of cadre capitalists and elite intellectuals in their own interests. Academic studies of peasant workers are available that I will review in the next chapter. However, an examination of the impact of modernity on peasant workers and their response to the formation of current Chinese society is absent and thus forms a central focus of my research project that is further explored in the following chapters.

²⁰ In respect to the material conditions of inequality and social stratification as a result of neoliberal modernization, China’s Eleventh Five-year Plan aims to build a ‘harmonious socialist society’ from 2006-2010, to enable disadvantaged groups such as peasant workers to benefit from the economic growth, moving the government strategy from Deng’s ‘getting rich first’ to ‘common prosperity’ (Fan, 2006).

Chapter Two

Literature Review

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2.5 Conclusion

2.1 Contributing to Literature

In contemporary China, a key element of the changing social structure has been the major impact of the new market economy led by the economic reforms of the late 1970s. This was initiated by the central government modernization project, as I explored in the last chapter. Rural-urban labour migration is one of the most visible effects of the economic reforms, in terms of urbanization and industrialization, offering rural people opportunities to work in non-agricultural sectors, and to leave the rural household, so as to generate income and thus overcome poverty. It has been a remarkable intervention in both developing urban industrialization and rural household economic development and modernization. Meanwhile, studies on Chinese rural-urban labour migration have focused on the macro level of economic, social and political structures; for instance, many studies have addressed the household registration system accompanying the rural/urban division and social inequality. This work has been important in revealing female workers' subordinated experience of working in the city. This literature with which I have critically engaged has informed my own project.

A key motivation for my thesis is the under-representation in migration studies of male migrants as a gendered category, particularly in a Chinese context. In 2006, the *International Migration Review (IMR)* issued a special collection on 'Gender and Migration Revisited', in which Mahler and Pessar (2003, 2006) claimed that 'gender matters' emphasizing gender as a cultural process rather than a natural phenomenon. They also argued for the importance of the dynamic inter-relationship between gender and migration in light of recent poststructuralist analysis which understands gender as 'relational and situational' (Mahler and Pessar, 2006:28) moving beyond the dichotomy of male and female. The collection made a significant contribution to current literature on Chinese rural-urban labour migration. More specifically, within this special

collection, Curran et al. (2006:200-201) have pointed out a major problem within this field of inquiry is that that sociological studies has failed to produce an inclusive approach to gender. They highlight the under-representation of men's experience of migration and the necessity to study migrant men as a gendered category in order to provide a more comprehensive and critical contribution to the field of inquiry.

My research specifically addresses the relative absence of male peasant workers in current mainstream Chinese research on gender and rural-urban labour migration. In order to contribute to this field of analysis, the chapter critically builds on: Chinese literature on rural-urban labour migration, Chinese feminist scholarship on female peasant workers, western research on men, masculinities and identity and new British feminist cultural studies scholarship. The under-representation of male peasant workers' experience has led me to adopt a multi-disciplinary perspective, in order to produce an alternative account with a focus on the public representation of (male) peasant workers, alongside my primary investigation of the migrant men's self-representation. Thus, emphasising the transformation of meanings of their lives within a rapidly changing contemporary urban China. These different literatures have helped me to develop a theoretical framework that informs my empirical work.

2.2 Current Literature on Chinese Rural-Urban Labour Migration

Traditional Marxism suggests that the large wave of population movement from rural to urban regions across different societies was an inevitable element of industrialization. For example, Goldstein and Goldstein (1987) have used 'Enclosure'¹ as a historical

¹ Enclosure is the process of subdivision of common land for privatization in England from the 12th to the 19th century. Academics believe that the enclosure movement created a class of population—peasants,

example of internal migration to demonstrate its significance in the process of modernization in England, as an integral aspect of the development of a wider European industrialization and modernization. They also acknowledge that such population movement is an inevitable historical consequence of China's neoliberal modernization process, from a planned to a market orientated economy. Indeed, developing countries such as China, are currently experiencing a similar pattern of internal migration. Early studies of Chinese rural-urban labour migration see the movement from agricultural to non-agricultural areas since 1978 as primarily an economic issue, which is considered one of the significant components of rapid economic development and modernization (Tan, 1986). There is also a series of social issues that have arisen as a result of the tension of modernization and rural-urban labour migration that I review later in the chapter. The rural-urban labour migrant or 'peasant worker' has become a major object of research within the areas of economics, sociology and politics, with a particular focus on issues such as, social stratification, discrimination/exclusion, integration and recent feminist work on identity formation.

2.2:1 Social stratification/exclusion

Within the dominant discourse of neoliberal modernization and development, current research on Chinese rural-urban labour migration is focused mainly around issues of the marginality or vulnerability of peasant workers in terms of their social status in contemporary society. Within such research, the *Hukou* system² is a topic that has been

who lacked land and property so that they moved from the rural to the urban areas in order to find work. This group of internal migrants are seen as an essential human resource for England's industrialization (Neeson, 1996).

² In China, they call this monitoring and control system the 'household registration system', known as '*hukou*' in Chinese (see Christiansen, 1990; Cheng & Selden, 1994; Chan & Zhang, 1999), which was

highlighted in the study of Chinese rural-urban labour migration. Its impact on this internal labour migration has been identified through social stratification and classification, seeing ‘peasant workers’ as *modernization losers* of this institutional system implemented by the central government’s economic development policy. Researchers from both mainland China (see Q, Li, 2004a; Jian et al. 2008) and overseas institutes (see Solinger, 1995, 1999a, 1999b; Xiang, 2007; Knight and Song, 1999, 2005) have acknowledged that the social classification, stratification and inequity of rural migrants in the cities fundamentally results from the household registration they hold, as well as other institutional barriers related to *Hukou* (i.e. the different benefits between the two household registrations) at the state level. From a Weberian analysis on social stratification and rural-urban labour migration, sociologists such as Q. Li (2004a) maintain that the stratification of peasant workers, who occupy a low social status position in society, is partly due to their exclusion within the dual rural/urban division with its associated *Hukou* system serving as an institutional barrier.

From this materialist point of view, *Hukou* is also seen as a domestic passport which manages population movement, as well as an initial source of identity formation which maintains a social and economic configuration (Chan and Zhang, 1999) within a two-class structure as a result of the rural/urban dichotomy (Solinger, 1999a). Such research suggests that due to the household registration system and the government’s policy preference in regional development, rural-urban labour migrants have been treated as second class citizens (Solinger, 1995, 1999a, 1999b; Knight and Song, 1999, 2005), as they are less likely to be able to access jobs, education, housing and health care

established in the 1950s, both in the city and in rural areas with two statuses: non-agricultural and agricultural *hukou* or urban/rural. It is criticised by some people as an obstacle to people’s mobility and their access to social welfare such, as housing, health services and education after migration and is seen as one of the factors of social stratification in China.

compared to their urban counterparts who have urban *hukou*. As Solinger (1995:117) notes, all rural migrants start from a common base which is caused by a low status peasantry household label. Meanwhile, this label also leads to the social classification of the migrant community. Xiang (2007) illustrates the impact of the current household registration system on the lives of rural-urban labour migrants:

‘While citizens can move elsewhere to search for jobs as labourers and they can purchase basic subsistence as consumers, they (rural-urban labour migrants) cannot settle down as they wish as social and political subjects.’ (Xiang, 2007:182)

In other words, rural-urban labour migrants are not entitled to a series of social and political benefits to which urban citizens have access. More significantly, they are socially discriminated against by local urban residents in the urban places where they work (Chan, 1998:889). However, a problem with such research is that while it emphasizes the role of the state in institutionalizing migration and its impact on social segregation in the wider society, it also tends to neglect and leave unproblematic the historical development of this phenomenon of social stratification in terms of rural-urban divisions, as well as the complexity of class formation in contemporary China. For example, class boundaries are not clearly shown (see Bian, 2002; Bian et al., 2005) in relation to the identification of certain groups of peasant workers, who have access to economic resources, as current materialist accounts indicate that there are diverse understandings in terms of class position for migrant workers. In addition, if we trace back the issue of the rural household and peasantry to the 1960s, when the household registration system emerged in China, the Chinese government’s campaign slogan was ‘Go up to the mountain and go down to the village’ (上山下乡), sending urban intellectual youth to be re-educated in rural villages by the peasants, then we might realize the historical significance of the formation of such social stratification. I will discuss this in detail in Chapter Four on the impact of the historical development of

ideology on the discursive formation of social stratification and identity formation of male peasant workers through public representations, such as government reports, media coverage and other forms of public narratives, within a particular historical juncture of post-Mao socialist modernization.

2.2:2 From exclusion and discrimination to integration and recognition

Questions about the recreation of class stratification, raised by rural-urban labour migration have started to emerge in contemporary Chinese society. Within the rural/urban dichotomy in post-Mao China, Solinger (1999b:456) notes, urban Chinese generally view rural Chinese as ‘ethnically distinct’, and that country-born Chinese have been excluded from the rights of urban citizenship due to the *hukou* they hold and the entitlement under this residential identity. They have been discriminated against historically and culturally, particularly since the economic reforms of the late 1970s and early 1980s with China’s entry into the global market and the state’s policy of developing selected regions. In more recent years, peasant workers’ social insurance, the education of peasant workers’ children in the city and health services for peasant workers have increasing visibility on the government’s policy making agenda. In relation to these issues, the aim is to institutionally integrate rural-urban labour migrants into state policy making, in order to minimize discrimination and marginalization resulting from rural-urban social divisions.

More recent studies tend to propose integrating peasant workers into their urban communities by means of reforming the household registration system to grant them urban citizenship, or promote ‘peasant workers’ citizenization’ (Liu and Xu, 2007; Jian et al., 2008) in order to remove institutional barriers resulted from rural-urban divisions.

For example, a recent policy think tank in China has proposed changing the household registration system as well as changing the name of ‘peasant workers’, to integrate them into a new social category as ‘industrial workers’³. Research such as Jian et al. (2008) supports the citizenization of peasant workers, maintaining that it is a fundamental principle of social justice to tackle the issues raised by peasant workers and rural-urban labour migration. However, such research is based on a simple positivist hypothesis that rural-urban migrant workers will gain better living conditions once their collective identity problem has been solved, without addressing the complex interconnecting historical, social, cultural, economic and political elements that help shape current representations. In a recent paper X. Wang (2009) critically points out that the integration of peasant workers into a general citizenship system may indicate the end of the term ‘peasant worker’ but not the end of the problems initiated by it. In response to the government initiative, I argue that there are deeper and more complex cultural issues involved. These issues relate to modernity and the modernizing project in China involving continuities and discontinuities in the move from ‘old times’ to ‘new times’ (see Chapter One), that have not been fully acknowledged in current research on the formation of this ‘ethnically distinct’ people (Solinger, 1999b) located within the current historical juncture.

³ On 27th January 2005, the Development Research Centre of the State Council released a new research report, suggesting that China needs to promote the reform of the household registration system, in order to create an institutional environment to change peasant workers to stable urban industrial workers. Source: <http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/news/1167429.htm>

2.2:3 Identity, identification of the ‘peasant worker’ and gender

Many current studies of Chinese rural-urban labour migration in terms of integration and recognition are influenced by the legacy of an economic materialist perspective and the suggested strategies to tackle the problem of over-coming institutional barriers in order to achieve the objective of ‘common prosperity’ (共同富裕). However, the problem is that they do not acknowledge the diverse experiences of peasant workers within the current socio-economic context, but rather position them as a result of Chinese modernization with a similar stable and fixed life experience (see Wang, 2009). What is underplayed here is the question of identity formation, which cannot simply be read off from the structural or material differences of occupying rural/urban, agricultural/non-agricultural contexts. It is a historical and cultural issue generated by the modernization project in China and the enlightenment of the ideological transformation from Mao’s to Deng’s economic strategy and accompanying rapid social changes. The official reclassification of peasant workers as ‘industrial workers’ and granting them urban citizenship is intended to integrate them into the urban development system both politically and ideologically. At the same time, it is intended to construct a new social class even though in reality it has existed for years, subsumed within the dual household registration system and the rural-urban division within the modernization process. The problem is that this recreation of social class no longer entitles them to a privileged social position as it once did in the pre-reform era.

Alongside this, there are other economic and cultural reasons that problematize the official policy on integration. Recent reports can be seen as examples illustrating the complexity of an integration strategy launched by the government, providing evidence

that not every peasant worker wishes to obtain urban citizenship⁴. Evidence also reveals some of them have returned home⁵ or intend to return home instead of staying on in cities (Murphy, 2002; Ma, 2001). This evidence suggests that the institutional ideology in terms of integrating migrant workers into the urban space does not correspond to their needs. Economic materialist accounts, which fail to address the question of peasant workers' subjectivities are unable to explain why this government policy which appears to be in their economic and social self-interest is resisted by many peasant workers. Therefore, it is important to empirically investigate how and why they position themselves within the discourse of modernization and development in response to the state's policy of integration. More specifically, it is important to explore whether they can identify with and make sense of modernization and positioning themselves in contemporary Chinese society, as Xiang Xia Ren (rural resident) or Cheng Li Ren (urbanite), peasant or worker, or an in-between status.

Within the dominant discourse of neoliberal modernization and development, the Chinese government aims to narrow the gap economically between rural and urban citizens, in order to enhance the quality of life of the rural population. Of particular importance in achieving this is the need to address problems of discrimination of rural-urban labour migrants, who are considered to be marginalized in current economic development, by improving the household registration system, housing and social insurance system. However, Zhang (2001:29) criticizes current research on Chinese

⁴ There is a new policy in some provinces that outstanding peasant workers can switch their rural hukou to an urban hukou. In the Jiangsu province, for example, there are around 20,000 peasant workers who are qualified to become urban citizens due to the new policy launched in October 2008. However, by July 2009, only 6 people registered to become urban citizens, suggesting that peasant workers are not enthusiastic towards the new policy.

Source: <http://finance.sina.com.cn/roll/20090809/21256591611.shtml> (accessed on 02-10-2009)

⁵ Murphy (2002:2) notes that around one third of the floating migrant population have been returning to their native hometown since 1995.

rural-urban labour migration for being ‘obsessed with the question of how to improve the government’s techniques to regulate rural migrants’. Her criticism of this dominant positivist research tradition raises the issue of the need to address peasant workers’ subjectivities and their meanings in order to understand their responses and how they make sense of themselves in modern urban spaces, located within a rapidly changing contemporary Chinese society.

Meanwhile, in claiming that mainstream research on rural-urban labour migration is gender-blind, ‘gender and migration’, as an emerging field of research in China examines structural issues associated migration through a gender perspective, with a particular focus on female peasant workers’ experiences and subjectivities. Scholars from mainland China and overseas have contributed to this new emerging area with their empirical analysis of the relation between gender and migration. Deploying a quantitative perspective on gender roles, they have studied structural gender differences in terms of motivation and decision making with reference to migration (Yang and Guo, 1999) the scale of migration (see Fan, 1999, 2003) and the gender division of work (Fan, 2003). They have worked with such hypotheses as female migrants experiencing more discrimination than their male counterparts due to gender segregation in Confucian familial patriarchal culture. The examination of the gender status of Chinese female migrant workers has been inspired by western feminism, and particularly by the second wave feminist movement and its accompanying notion of patriarchy as central to understanding women’s position in society.

The focus of current research on gender and rural-urban labour is the issue of a multi-layered gender inequality, emphasising female migrants’ unequal gender status and ‘bitter’ experience in social contexts both within their rural home villages and in urban spaces (Huang, 2001; Liang and Chen, 2004). Such research seeks politically to

challenge existing gendered discrimination and marginalization against women by illustrating their dominated status and the ‘reality’ of their day to day lived experience in China. More recently, the question of subjectivity and identity in the process of rural-urban migration has also emerged in social research with a focus on female subjectivities and identity formation, such as Pun’s (2005) work on Chinese Dagong Mei (working girls), addressing their agency and individual self formation in modern Chinese urban space, Yan’s (2008) ethnographic study of female rural domestic workers (*baomu*) in Beijing and Jacka’s (2005a) ethnographic study of rural women in urban China.

2.2:3-1 New worker-subject: a journey for modern subjectivity

Pun (1999, 2005) examines the formation of the new worker-subject--‘Dagong Mei’ (working girls or female migrant workers) within a Foucauldian analysis of ‘techniques of the self’, with a focus on their class identity through the lens of gender. This is located within the context of modernization in which the cumulative effects of the state communist party, the capitalist market economy and Chinese patriarchal culture are examined. Ethnographically, she explores female migrant workers’ experiences within a factory, arguing that these women live within conditions which are shaped by socialist institutional regulation such as *hukou*, capitalist exploitation, as well as the restrictions of a patriarchal culture that leads to multiple, interconnecting layers of repression and discrimination. For example, she illustrates that women experience discrimination due to their *hukou* status and gender identity, which are associated with backwardness and subordination, thus becoming obstacles for them to position themselves in urban modern space. She explores a variety of possibilities for rural women to resist the

authority of the three institutional hegemonic powers (global capitalism, state and patriarchal family) that position them as subordinated subjects. For example, Pun (1999, 2005) illustrates the dynamics of power relations in terms of kin-ethnic relations in the formation of different social identities among female migrant workers with their different status and social hierarchy represented by these kin and ethnic identities within and outside the workplace. Rather than simply arguing for the inevitability of these women's difficult lives and passive acceptance of their destinations, Pun also raises the issue of the women's pursuit of modernity in conditions of globalization, emphasising the autonomy of these women's agency with an accompanying expression of desire for independence and choices, such as consuming modern goods to construct their modern self identities, which she sees, are different to traditional rural identities. Similar research, such as Davin's (1996) work, maintains that rural-urban labour migration provides opportunities for rural young women to develop their personal autonomy and bring material resources back to rural spaces, while they still remain disadvantaged within patriarchal conditions. Meanwhile, Murphy (2004) also argues for the potential empowerment of rural young women through their modern life experience that leads to their being discontent and finding it difficult to accommodate themselves when they return to their rural homes.

2.2:3-2 Women migrants: a 'hybrid' of rural and urban experiences

As indicated above, Pun (2005) raises an important issue of identity formation as the rural female migrants in her research are located within a context of the cumulative impact of the state, global capitalism and traditional patriarchal culture on their lives. In terms of conceptualizing rural-urban labour migrants' identities as rural or urban, some

research tends to position women as occupying an ‘inbetween-ness’ or ‘hybrid’ status, which is seen as an obstacle preventing them being free from both rural and urban dominant spaces, neither to which they belong. For example, they are underrepresented within rural patriarchal familial culture and experience exclusion due to their rural identity from the modernization project currently taking place in China. Research, such as that of Ma and Cheng (2005), highlight the ‘inbetween-ness’ of rural-urban labour migrants’ experience within globalizing modern conditions, in their ethnographic studies on Chinese rural-urban labour migrants’ (in particular female migrant workers’) experiences of love, intimacy and marriage. The entry into modern space has increased female migrant workers’ attempts to deal with the contradictory demands of modern and traditional values. Ma and Cheng (2005:308-309) argue that ‘migrant workers, accustomed to a relatively stable emotional language and the practice of early marriage, are thrown into a fluid set of discourses about dating, love, romance, choices and desires. In their detraditionalized and deterritorialized life worlds, migrant workers find themselves in a ruptured discursive space where new intimate experiences require new hybrid vocabularies to express themselves.’ Such a perspective resonates with suggestions made by scholars about peasant workers and social stratification, such as Li (2004a, 2004b), who argues that peasant workers belong to a ‘third group’ which is different to both rural and urban groups. He suggests that they are formulating a new identity category. Within a British context, Parker (1995) in his study of British young Chinese criticizes theories of hybridity. He argues against the term hybridity, suggesting it ‘runs the risk of glorying in disjuncture, producing a new rigidity and an academicist alterity, which merely values difference for its own sake’ (ibid.:26). In response, I would suggest that we need more sustained empirical work within China to

make a conceptual contribution to such terms as: ‘in-betweenness’, ‘third space’ or ‘hybridity’ and to gain a sense of their explanatory value.

2.2:3-3 Disconnection between post-Mao modernity and rural women’s lived experiences

The above literatures emphasize the central role of agency and its constitution in understanding the social structure of female subordination. McNay (2004:176) criticizes recent cultural feminist models of racism and sexism for being ‘essentially ahistorical because they disconnect questions of identity recognition from the context of access to economic resources and other types of social capitals.’ Acknowledging the complexity of identity and subjectivity formation for rural women in the process of rural-urban labour migration in a post-Mao modernization period, Yan’s (2008) study on female rural domestic workers (*baomu*) in urban Beijing illustrates their difficulties in constructing their ‘personhood’ within a social context marked by development, growth, modernity, *suzhi* and consumption. In her research, Yan raises a key issue of the imaginary of the rural/urban difference, within which rural female migrants locate themselves. As she maintains,

‘What is at issue here is not simply how bad rural life is for young women and how much better urban life is. What is critical is how the ideological and material rise of the city and the emaciation of the rural reorganize how rural youth imagine the future and modernity.’ (Yan, 2008:45)

Meanwhile, Yan illustrates the contradictory experiences that urban modernity offers these women and the disconnection between them and urban modernity.

‘In the context of post-Mao development the very condition enabling...women’s entrance into the city, the centre of the new commodity economy, is that they themselves be disposable commodities of migrant labour

power. Thus, the very condition enabling their entry and existence in the city fundamentally forecloses the possibility of attaining the modern personhood for which they have struggled' (Yan, 2008:51).

Yan (2008) argues that this group of migrant women experience extreme exploitation in the neoliberal market economy, while at the same time they are offered a mirage of success and progression as they migrate from rural areas to the cities. She maintains that there is a wide disconnection between the rural women's imagination of seeing migration as a journey in search of a new identity, fulfilling their expectation of 'accumulating sushi (human quality)' in the modern space, and their material lived experiences of working in the city. In her own words, they are 'trapped as modern subjects in a space in, but not of, the culture of modernity' (Yan, 2008:46). Yan has provided a Marxist analysis of the production of a labour subject, highlighting rural women's struggle to find a sense of place in the context of modernization and development. However, there is a sense of pessimism in her study, compared to cultural feminists' arguments about empowerment and self reflexivity. While she addresses the difficulties of rural women's experience and their struggle, she fails to address the resources enabling them to accommodate themselves within urban spaces and their emerging sense of self.

2.2:3-4 Relational gender values as resources of positioning and subjectivity

It is important to understand the complex interrelation between 'structure and agency' that the above research fails to address and acknowledge the complexity of location in a post-Mao or postsocialist society. Neither a focus on the structural formation of working-class women, nor a focus on rural women's resistance and empowerment in response to structural constraint is sufficient on its own to capture the complexity of

Chinese female peasant workers' identity formation. Jacka's (1997, 2005a, 2005b) anthropological work on Chinese rural migrant women, while claiming the importance of recognising rural women's agency, suggests that their experience in modern space through rural-urban labour migration may "cement the bonds of kinship and reinforce tradition" (Jacka, 1997:139). In other words, traditional gender roles are reinscribed in the construction of these women's subjectivities. In her later research on rural women in urban China, Jacka (2005a) provides an ethnographic study with a dynamic account of rural migrant women's urban lived experience as well as changing gender relations in this process. She explores their identity formation through their narratives and lived experiences in terms of responding to the new positions and values opened up by this geographical relocation from the rural to the urban, associated with the transformation from tradition to modernity.

Jacka maintains that 'explicit identification based on gender plays a very minor role in migrant women's representation of their identities and experience' (Jacka, 2005a: 223). Rather, the process of their identification is through their relations with other people in their narratives. However, I would argue that these social relations are explicitly gendered if we locate them in a Chinese context, acknowledging the centrality of familial relations involving motherhood, sisterhood, being a wife/partner, and so on. In her discussion, she argues that rural women are absorbing new values in modern spaces, however, their responses to these changing values is 'not a shift from rural to urban, but a furthering of rural values' (ibid.: 249), as traditional gender values as mothers, wives and daughter-in-laws are orienting their decisions and behaviour. She observes that these migrant women continue to maintain close contact with their rural families even though they are against the traditional patriarchal culture in their rural village. Jacka (2005b) also suggests that:

‘men may be more inclined to view migration as a way of fulfilling their obligations as a family breadwinner, whereas young women may feel those obligations less strongly and may therefore be relatively “free” to pursue more individually oriented goals.’ (Jacka, 2005b:61)

Such a comment is of particular importance in understanding gender relations in the process of modernization and rural-urban labour migration. However, she does not develop the issue of men’s position as her research is focussed on female migrant workers.

Jacka’s (2005a, 2005b) research on rural women’s positioning in urban China resonates with Adkins’ (2000) notion of the retraditionalization of gender. She (Adkins, 2000) argues that women may be reflexivity losers, depending on their capability to access information and communication structures. In other words, they can be reflexivity winners only after they have obtained access to such structures. In relation to the location of rural migrants in the material conditions of post-Mao modernization, the latter argument of Adkins’ Bourdieusian analysis is of particular importance in addressing the issue of gender and class formation in contemporary China that earlier research fails to acknowledge. For example, Yan’s (2008) study can be seen as an illustration of a disconnection between rural women’s (habitus) and the modernization and development of rural-urban labour migration (the field). In addressing the issue of agency and subjectivity in late modernity, Adkins (2004:191) acknowledges that ‘there is a lack of fit between habitus and field in certain public spheres of action via an increasing transposition or movement of the feminine habitus from private to public spheres.’ Adkins (1999) elsewhere analyzes the retraditionalization of gender and suggests that ‘tradition may be part of or be invoked by the modern: women may be “traditional” in relation to new economies, but in this they are not simply being non-modern...but rather being precisely modern’ (Adkins, 1999:135).

Returning to recent studies on rural women in urban China, nearly all the literatures I studied above maintain that the formation of this new social category operates through a discourse that perceives them as ‘others’ and ‘outsiders’ in a post-Mao Chinese modernization period, and therefore advocate the importance of an inclusive strategy achieved through political as well as social identification. However, what is the position of rural male migrants in this transition? Are earlier feminist explanations also applicable to male peasant workers? Is this understanding of otherness still valid in current social, cultural and political discourses? With reference to feminist work in this field of inquiry, contradictions may emerge when we explore the position of male peasant workers within the process of rural-urban labour migration. Within a feminist explanatory logic, in terms of gender, male peasant workers are seen as occupying a privileged gender position.

One of the problems of the current literature on rural-urban labour migration is its reflection of the dominant discursive narratives of modernization and development, which constructs a new taken-for-granted ‘stereotypical’ social category, the peasant worker. However, as Foucault suggested meanings and knowledge about subjects vary in different historical periods (see Hall, 1997:46). Currently, there is a failure to trace the historical trajectory and changing meanings of the concepts of ‘peasant’ and ‘worker’ to ‘peasant worker’ and a failure to explore the continuities and discontinuities of meanings of its formation within China’s modernization process at both the state and local level. The process of presenting (male) peasant workers as others essentializes and fixes the identity of this group of people. Given the political implications of representation, it is necessary to critically explore official and academic notions of ‘othering’ and the social stratification of peasant workers as a group through a discursive analysis of the public representation of them (see chapter 4).

2.2:4 The need for men's accounts of rural-urban labour migration

Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) acknowledges the problem of the conceptualization of gender in the current literature on gender and migration,

‘While the immigration literature underscores the importance of these social networks, insofar as they provide important resources and connections, most of the literature either ignores the gender-based character of these networks or assumes that male-dominated immigrant networks are natural and do not need further inquiry’ (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994: 7).

This is still a dominant assumption in current literature on gender and rural-urban labour migration in China with the emphasis on women and femininity and accounts of men and masculinity absent. Willis and Yeoh (2000: xv) maintain that gender relations can be renegotiated in new contextual spaces provided by a new location of migration. Such renegotiation of gender relations is of importance in rethinking contemporary patriarchal society. Current research in this field of analysis, deploying structuralist accounts of patriarchy, continues to be of central importance in a contemporary Chinese context. However, an unintended effect of such research may be that by ‘emphasizing wider social structures of oppression that determine the position of men, these accounts tend to marginalize men’s subjectivities’ (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003:11).

Although mainstream gender and migration studies criticize current migration studies as ‘gender blind’ and ‘male dominated’ (Wright, 1995; Chant, 1992), research on Chinese male migrants is absent from current literature on Chinese rural-urban labour migration. Most work in this field adopts a structuralist and statistical perspective attempting to capture the ‘reality’ of a post-Mao class-based society. However, recent analysis of female migrant workers has provided important accounts of gender experience through the lens of feminism. The latter work focusing on Chinese female peasant workers’

experiences highlights the dynamics of gender inequality within contemporary society, emphasizing women's vulnerable social economic position as well as the (re)construction of female subjectivities in the process of internal migration. However, even though these scholars locate their projects within a post-structural position, they do not escape the theoretical and political influence of second wave feminist's standpoint epistemology of the general subordination of women compared to men in a patriarchal society.

In the above work male peasant workers, although not explicitly addressed in gender terms, tend to be seen as occupying a relatively more powerful gender position in Chinese patriarchal society. This reflects conventional thinking in China, with the concept of gender assumed to be associated with women, while men are not perceived to be gendered. In other words, men's narratives, especially rural men's accounts of their experiences of internal migration have been taken for granted and their voices have been absent in mainstream studies of gender and migration. Hence, there is only one dimension of men's lives highlighted in the process of rural-urban labour migration, which according to the logic of current research is that of gender privilege. However, as Kimmel (1987) argues, gender is socially constructed within a historical context of gender relations, with definitions of masculinity responding relationally to changing definitions of femininity. The (re)construction of masculinities among Chinese male peasant workers is influenced by the (re)construction of Chinese female migrant workers' femininities. Therefore, men's subjectivities also become unstable with changes in women's experiences in social and cultural transformation. Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007) maintain the importance of studying men and masculinity in gender studies, which challenges the conventional perspective of only marking women as gender beings. They argue that:

‘Analysing men as a politically gendered category removes it from its normative location as transparent, neutral and disembodied.’ (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007:29)

Although current literature on female migrant workers cannot provide a comprehensive explanation of male peasant workers’ lives, it has provided a productive analytical framework to critically explore men’s experiences in this process, particularly in relation to their family connections and workplace social relations and their response to material based social stratification within contemporary Chinese society. However, what remains absent is a systematic exploration of Chinese male peasant workers located within the current transitional era of rapid global change, of a state communist party and a market-economy oriented modernization, alongside men’s accounts of their own experiences and understandings of their relocated lives in cities.

Chinese government officials and academics have shown increasing concern about the current and future status of migrating peasant workers. However, we know little about migrating male peasant workers’ own responses to current state sponsored rapid socio-economic changes. There are tensions between what they are expected to do by the state as ‘modern’ political subjects and how they manage to live out their new identity as they are also living within a traditional familial society, where men’s duties are explicitly defined. In other words, there is a tension between the two structures of ‘old times’ and ‘new times’, as well as a tension between social expectations outlined by the state and how this is lived out at a local level, within specific households and workplaces. I argue that there is a gap in the current literature that is failing to address these tensions which I believe is important to critically investigate in order to develop a more sophisticated understanding of this new social category in contemporary China. In order to understand their self positioning in society, we need to examine the lives of peasant workers at both a structural level, emphasizing the society’s modernization

project (more importantly the transition from Mao's socialist modernization to post-Mao socialist modernization), and at an individual level, how peasant workers accommodate themselves within this process of modernization mediated through their local experiences of rapid global change. Willis (2000:173) suggests that 'cultural forms provide the materials towards, and the immediate context of, the construction of subjectivities and the confirmation of identity.' In this thesis, a structural account of rural-urban labour migration is complemented by an examination of cultural practices, emphasizing a *constrained* individual and collective agency lived out by *creative* migrating male peasant workers.

Parker's (1995) study on young Chinese people in Britain argues for the importance of acknowledging the interrelation of structure and culture:

'Rather than bifurcating issues of structure and culture, we should see structural influences as working in and through the cultural domain, which both constitutes and reproduces the very structures that constrain it. A genuinely interdisciplinary cultural studies should provide the basis for keeping the complex interactions of the cultural, economic and historical realms in tension throughout the study of a specific group of people.' (Parker, 1995:16)

Reflecting this theoretical position, my study is seeking to critically contribute to the current literature developed by social stratification studies and feminist studies on Chinese rural-urban labour migration. This will enable a contribution to an historical, economic and cultural interconnected understanding of identity formation of gender and social class through an exploration of rural-urban migrants' accounts. The thesis aims to study Chinese male peasant workers' identity formation in this particular historical period, in order to understand the meanings of rural-urban labour migration through the men's narratives. By studying Chinese male peasant workers' identity formation through the lens of masculinity, the thesis seeks to critically build on feminist work in

contributing to a new understanding that captures the complex inter-section of gender and social class in contemporary China.

2.3 Research on Men, Masculinities and Identity

The first half of the chapter has reviewed current research on gender and rural-urban labour migration and identified a missing account of men in current literature. This section reviews the development of literature on men, masculinities and identity. It aims to highlight the critical debate of identity formation and the importance of locating masculinity studies within contemporary material conditions in order to expand the vocabulary of global masculinities in current research. In terms of studying men's experience, Hearn (1996) is sceptical about the usefulness of the concept of 'masculinities', while advocating the need to shift the study of masculinities to study of men. In response, Connell (2000:18-17) acknowledges the difficulties of defining and studying masculinity. However, she defends the legitimacy of the use of masculinities that enables us to capture diverse male behaviour, particularly at times of social and cultural change. This is important insight in understanding the meaning of male peasant workers' practices in the current historical period of post-Mao socialist modernization.

2.3:1 Masculinity: from oppression to multiple masculine subjective identities

Research on men and masculinities has developed in the past few decades, moving beyond early pro-feminist studies on masculinity as gender oppression which highlighting the central role of patriarchy in the formation of gender relations (Hearn, 1987; Walby, 1990). Connell's (1995) notion of 'hegemonic masculinity' opened up

discussion on power in the formation of both dominant and subordinated masculinities. Later research also developed a more complex picture of multiple masculine identities (Brittan, 1989; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003), while other research has emphasised the need to examine the socio-historical constitution of masculinity in late modernity (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 2007). Middleton (1989) suggests it is important to go beyond the standpoint of oppression and domination, highlighted by western second-wave feminists and other pro-feminist scholars, and to focus on the dimension of subjective meanings in different social relations emanating from subjects' experience and practice. At the same time, studies on men and masculinities also suggest that a contemporary understanding of masculinity should be located within a framework of globalization that crosses national borders and cultures (Sweetman, 1997; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 2007). Referring to late modernity frameworks in terms of identity formation, Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003:13) acknowledge such diversity embedded within rapid social and cultural changes.

‘The question of identity has emerged as one of the key dynamic concepts in the context of rethinking social and cultural change. It is suggested that sociocultural change is marked by the disintegration of older social collectivises - such as social class – and increased fluidity of social relationships, with an accompanying interest in identity and subjectivity (Bradley, 1996). More specifically, there has been a focus on the pluralisation of identities involving process of fragmentation and dislocation (Giddens, 1991; Hall, 1992).’

2.3:2 Theorizing identity: social relations, class and habitus

For Weeks (1990:88), ‘identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core of your individuality. But it is also about

social relationships, your complex involvement with others.’ In other words, identity is not just about sameness and difference that is given and represented within public discourse. Identity is involved with the issue of identification (Lawler, 2008:2). It is about who I am and how I position myself in response to the external social environment and social relations. It is a process about identification and positioning within social structures rather than an ascribed collective entity. Lawler (ibid.) illustrates the complexity of identification:

‘I may identify as a woman at the same time as dis-identifying from certain features of being a “woman” that I find unattractive or unpalatable. I may identify myself as a woman but be identified by others as something else--as a man, perhaps, or a girl.’ (Lawler, 2008:2)

‘Peasant worker’ is an identity discursively constructed and allocated by the state and other public narratives. Within the current dominant discourse of modernization, the term ‘peasant worker’ entails connotations of backwardness, in contrast to the progress of the modernization project. How peasant workers make sense of their allocated positions and relocate themselves from the rural to the urban space is of importance in understanding their identities. Living within the conditions in which the Chinese government’s dominant public narrative of neoliberal modernization is advocating a market economy and getting rich, institutional barriers prevent this particular group of people achieving a future to which they are directed, thus creating a major tension. Current government policies are in conflict with those operating in a pre-reform period. These tensions have created a particular cultural environment within which male peasant workers’ identities are constructed through a series of negotiations and complex repositionings. Hall (1996a:16) argues that ‘the theorization of identity is a matter of considerable political significance, and is only likely to be advanced when both the

necessity and the “impossibility” of identities, and the suturing of the psychi and the discursive in their constitution, are fully and unambiguously acknowledged.’

A further issue is an absence of migrants’ own accounts. In contrast, current Chinese research on gender and migration, represented by feminist literature, claims female migrants’ agency, highlighting their response to feminism and their power of resistance to the ‘othering’ process located within social change. Such claims correspond to western reflexive modernity theorists, such as Giddens (1990, 1991) and Beck (1994). The ‘extended reflexive modernists’ as Adams (2003, 2007) calls them, argue for reflexivity of identity formation in late modernity conditions, in which individuals are seen as constantly reflecting on their own social behaviour and absorbing new knowledge in the construction of their lives without being controlled by structural constraints. Giddens (1991) suggests the characteristics of a reflexive self in late modernity. He maintains that,

‘the reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through an abstract system. In modern social life, the notion of lifestyle takes on a particular significance. The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options.’(Giddens, 1991:5)

Within female peasant workers’ accounts, examples such as love, relationships and consumption have been identified by feminist researchers (see, Pun, 2005; Davin, 1996) as illustrating the development of agency. However, Bauman (1988) conceptualizes a different perspective of identity, in response to the notion of freedom. As he notes:

‘Everyone has to ask himself the question ‘who am I, ‘how should I live’, ‘who do I want to become’ – and at the end of the day, be prepared to accept responsibility for the answer. In this sense freedom, is for the modern individual the fate he cannot escape, except by retreating into the fantasy world or through mental disorders. Freedom is therefore a mixed blessing. One needs

it to be oneself; yet being oneself solely on the strength of one's free choice means a life full of doubts and fears of error ... Self construction of the self is, so to speak a necessity. Self confirmation of the self is an impossibility' (Bauman 1988:62).

More recent western literatures have started to question the viability of understanding identity as individual forms that are socially and culturally constructed (Adams, 2003, 2007; Lawler, 2008). Lawler (2008:8), for example, maintains that identity should to be understood 'not as belonging "within" the individual person, but as produced between persons and within social relations.' In his work *Self and Social Change*, Adams (2007) criticizes 'extended reflexive modernists' for their tendency to universalize the constitution of the self and its relation with social change, without considering the positioning of social groups and individuals relative to social structures. He (2003: 224-225) maintains that 'if reflexivity is a product of a particular culture, then clearly our knowledgeability is shaped and compromised by the 'limits' of that culture.' Adams (2007:163) concludes that 'the self is constructed according to established patterns, set by the cultural norms, traditions and sanctions in which one's self-development takes place'. What he tries to maintain is the continuity of patterns in terms of social practices that are lived out in the process of social change.

Adams's argument supports the idea of the importance of localization in understanding self-identity formation. Researchers using western theoretical and conceptual frameworks without acknowledging cultural context in understanding identity formation may be read as a form of academic imperialism, as suggested by post-colonial scholars (Spivak, 1988; Kapoor, 2004). Such an approach is quite common in research carried out by young Chinese scholars in China and scholars working overseas, who lack reflexive analysis of the cultural specificity of the American/European concepts they theoretically and empirically use within a Chinese context. Their analysis

is constrained by the academic language they use, which cannot escape from the cultural constraints of particular stand-point epistemological positions. Such an approach is also commonly adopted in research on female migrant workers, in which the western concepts originating within a framework of second-wave feminism⁶, such as patriarchy and sexual politics, are deployed. In this case, these western concepts tend not to open up the research, but rather to limit our exploration of the local construction of subjectivities and our interpretations of Chinese women's experiences in the process of rural-urban labour migration. Adkins (2004) suggests a critical perspective on the conceptualization of female subjectivities as engaging in practice between the social and the subject rather than simply understanding the subject as a blind follower of the social. She maintains that: 'this notion of the subject as not simply engaged with the world, but in the world is one which has great appeal to feminists' (ibid.:10).

Skeggs' (1997) *Formations of Class & Gender* illustrates the usefulness of Bourdieu's social theory and offers an insightful perspective in terms of the construction of identities and subjectivities of working-class women based on a British Cultural Studies tradition of studying 'the lived experience of how....women inhabit different social positions and cultural representations' (Skeggs, 1997:1-2). In her own words,

'Identities are not ...reflections of objective social positions which is how class is often theorized (if at all). This... would be to see identities always retrospectively. Nor are the social positions essential categories. Identities are continually in the process of being re-produced as responses to social positions, through access to representational systems and in the conversion of forms of capital.' (Skeggs, 1997:94)

⁶ Second-wave feminists tend to focus on sexual politics, patriarchy, as well as division of labour by different sexes, emphasizing men's patriarchal power over women and women's subordination domestically and publicly at work (Walby 1990, 1997). Patriarchy is explained as a machinated system that produces a hierarchy in which men as a group have been privileged so they dominate, oppress as well as exploit women.

By using Bourdieu's (1989) metaphors of capitals⁷, Skeggs' (1997) critical examination of women's social location and subjectivities suggests that the women in her research are not the originators in producing their identities as they do not occupy the economic and cultural conditions that would enable them to construct what she refers to as a middle class notion of self-identity. It is through 'the nexus of structures, power relations and capital transfers which produce frameworks of representation and values which establish what it is to be a White working-class woman' (Skeggs, 1997:160). She also argues elsewhere that 'the cultural resources for self-making and the techniques for self-production are class processes and making the self makes class' (Skeggs, 2004:75).

Such an argument provides useful access to the study of Chinese peasant workers. Particularly, it enables us to move beyond current structuralist based feminist studies of Chinese gender and migration, in which female peasant workers are passively located as a disadvantaged, vulnerable group or second-class citizens. Skeggs (1997) suggests that working class women operate within a different trajectory to middle class women in constructing their subjectivities. As she maintains, there are limitations that constrain them in how they 'deploy many constructive and creative strategies to generate a sense of themselves with value' (Skeggs, 1997:162) within the dominant discursive ideology, operating within British society. In this process, a particular culture of working class women is revealed in constructing their various subjectivities, which are developed within the context of close relations with others and more public social relations rather than an individualistic project. Her argument in terms of the theorization of the self provides a profound criticism of the project of the self as a 'western bourgeois project' (Skeggs, 1997:163).

⁷ Social capital, cultural capital, economic capital, symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1989)

Butler (1999) argues against Bourdieu's habitus, seeing it as a concept that is unable to understand individual reflexivity and social change, as he over emphasizes structure in directing social practice (also see Arnot, 2002). With reference to the concept of habitus that has been deployed by new feminist studies, Bourdieu (1988) understands it as a system of dispositions which is developed to overcome the dialectical division of objectivism and subjectivism in terms of practices. Feminists, such as McNay (2008:163), maintain the importance of experience in terms of gender subjectivity formation. She argues that 'the idea of practice that is central to the concept of habitus counters the objectivism of cultural feminist accounts of embodiment, suggesting that agency is not only a discursively generated capacity but also a lived relation' (ibid.:163). She maintains that 'this socio-centric orientation towards embodiment does not undermine an account of agency by asserting an indivisible complicity between dispositions and social structures, it rather construes it in terms of "regulated liberties"' (ibid.:163), which serves to defend its viability in understanding individual social practice against a post-structuralist perspective, as I noted above. Kraus (2006) highlights the importance of Bourdieu's concept of habitus in terms of reflexivity within conditions of social change. Within this context, she also argues:

'Bourdieu's construction of habitus also leaves room for increasing consciousness of doxa: given that the habitus is the embodiment of the agent's life history – and given the contradictions in the agent's experiences with the social world – the habitus should be seen as a place where conflicting experiences and classifications come together.' (Kraus, 2006:130)

As 'the socially made body' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:127), habitus is also characterized as relational. For Lawler (2008:131), habitus " 'makes sense' only in the context of a specific local context or 'fields'...(habitus) exist in relation to each other". Bourdieu (1988:782-783) uses the term - 'feel for the game', to argue that social action has nothing to do with rational choice, it relies on our unconscious feeling of habitus to

operate. Habitus exists within the body but also beyond the body, so that it opens up possibilities beyond embodied power relations, for instance, within social embodied gender relations that are assigned to men and women. Unlike role theory for example, such as gender roles, which has been criticized as essentialising gender practices, habitus in the field of gender indicates that gender behaviour is not simply imposed from an external structural stance through gender expectations, values or norms. Rather, habitus works within social interaction through practicing those internalized rules and values (noted by Kraus and Williams, 2000:57). I understand Bourdieu's notion of habitus as conceptualizing embodied individual social practice without constraining possibility and creativity.

I do not intend to discredit second-wave feminist research in terms of speaking for the welfare of Chinese women by representing their 'bitter' experience and their desire to pursue a modern autonomous self. However, we need to reflexively consider that particular traditional cultural or social experiences and practices may at the same time have negative effects *and* be major resources for rural women's narrated trajectory, in making sense of their position in modern space and the construction of their self identity.

2.3.3 Thinking masculinities globally: locating global masculinities

In light of Skeggs' (1997) *Formation of Class and Gender*, which sees self construction in terms of femininity as a 'western bourgeois project', alongside Hearn (1996:209), who sees masculinity as a Eurocentric term, in terms of studying men and masculinities, it is important to link the western concept of men and masculinities with Chinese culture, in order to tease out the meanings of Chinese migrating masculinities from their

‘lived experiences’. Of importance, current research on global masculinities has advocated the importance of exploring them in their localized context (see Connell, 1998; Louie and Low, 2003; Jones, 2006), while at the same time, highlighting the importance of examining Confucian gender ideology (also see Louie, 2002). Of importance, they have also generated Chinese notions of masculinity, characterized as ‘wen’ and ‘wu’; ‘yin’ and ‘yang’ (see Louie, 2002; Song, 2004, 2006). Some anthropological studies on the Chinese community have also examined specific Chinese masculinities through local experiences (see Dautcher, 2009⁸).

Connell (1995, 1998, 2002) has provided a valuable analytical guideline to studies of local men and masculinities in a global context. She (1998:17-18) maintains that characteristics of masculinities are various in different parts of the world. For example, she notes, that Confucianism in east-Asian is associated with the characteristics of ‘hierarchy and social consensus’, while in Christian North America masculinities are associated with the characteristics of ‘modern hedonism and individualism and greater tolerance for social conflict.’ As I discussed in Chapter One, in terms of Chinese modernization and global modernity, there is a need to be reflexive about using western concepts. Hence, in order to examine migrant men’s identity formation, there is a need to historically and culturally contextualise their social relations rather than discussing self-identity in a vacuum. This is discussed further in the next chapter. However, Connell (2002:55) also argues elsewhere that ‘a structure of relations does not mechanically determine how people or groups act. That was the error of deterministic Marxism. But a structure of relations certainly defines possibilities and consequences.’

⁸ See Dautcher’s (2009) anthropological study on identity and masculinity in a Uyghur community in Xinjiang, China. He examines how people in this community perform and express a local understanding of community, gendered social relations, personality, prosperity and piety, with a focus on local Muslim men’s experience.

Therefore, Connell (1998) emphasises the importance of acknowledging the world's local gender order which is different from the specificities of European-American models, while also maintaining the importance of the interrelations of the local, national and global in studies of men and masculinities. She argues:

‘What happens in localities is affected by the history of whole countries, but what happens in countries is affected by the history of the world. Locally situated lives are now (indeed, have long been) powerfully influenced by geopolitical struggles, global markets, multinational corporations, labour migration, trans-national media. It is time for this fundamental fact to be built into our analysis of men and masculinities.’ (Connell, 1998:7)

While Carrigan et al. (1985:591) argue that ‘masculinities are constructed not just by power relations, but by their interplay with a division of labour and with patterns of emotional attachment,’ Mac an Ghaill (1994) argues that masculinities are complex and unstable that need to be enacted and performed through everyday social interactions. In his later book with Haywood, they maintain that ‘we cannot “read off” a masculinity from its relationship to the economic sector’ (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003:39). Such recognition resonates with current feminist studies of gender and migration in China with an emphasis on ‘experience’, alongside questions of mobility in terms of relocation of family and re-accommodation of work from agricultural to non-agricultural sectors. Chapters Five and Chapter Six critically examine these themes, aiming to understand the (re)construction of rural men’s masculine identities through an analysis of their experiences and interpersonal interactions. Meanwhile, Zhong (2000:12) notes that ‘the issue of masculinity constitutes an intrinsic part of our understanding of Chinese modernity’, using local narratives to explain contemporary Chinese society within a context of modernity in general. This resonates with Connell’s (1995) argument that masculinity is the result of modernization.

2.4 Men and Migrating Masculine Identities

Accordingly, the (re)construction of masculinity in practice has become the centre of inquiry in current research on men and migration. Current research, such as that of Boehm (2004, 2008) and Cohen (2006) on Latin American male migrants to the US, and Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella's (2000) study on male migration in Kerala are a few examples that illustrate the significance of studying men's accounts of migration (also see Donaldson et al., 2009; Batnitzky et al., 2009). For example, in her research on Latin American's migration to the US, Boehm (2004, 2008) maintains that transnational migration becomes a stage that both enables and challenges the masculinity of migrant men, as she acknowledges, 'because men are expected to migrate, the masculinity of those who do not go north is called into question. Paradoxically, men may have their masculinity stripped from them as they leave behind their role as farmers to work in low-wage jobs in the United States.' (Boehm, 2008: 20). Therefore, on the one hand, migration is 'a primary stage on which expressions of male subjectivities are performed' (ibid.: 21). While on the other hand, migrant men do not see migration as an empowerment process, when they are in the US, due to other institutional challenges, such as residency status and class stratification. This resonates with Cohen's (2006) argument that transnational migration provides a mechanism that enables the negotiation of transnational gendered and classed subjectivity.

Studies of men and migration have also moved away from an economic determinist approach to a cultural anthropological approach. Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella's (2000) research shows that the young men migrate to the Gulf area not only to escape from unemployment—the economic rationale for migration. But, as they maintain, migration 'is also a move away from payyanhood (young immature status) towards full adult status as a householder, defined by the combination of marriage, fatherhood and

showing ability as a ‘provider’...is a means of bridging a gap between payyanhood and manhood’ (Osella & Osella, 2000:120-122). The significance of their research is an examination of the negotiation and construction of masculinities through the male migrants’ narratives. Most importantly, an economic motivation is no longer sufficient to provide a broad understanding of rural-urban labour migration.

Alongside this, there are a few studies on migrating masculinities of overseas Chinese migrants (Cheng, 1998; Da, 2004; Hibbins, 2003a, 2003b, 2005). For example, in Hibbins’s (2005) study on Chinese male skilled immigrants in Australia, he maintains that ‘Chineseness’, is centrally marked by ‘responsibility for family as sole provider, guardian and protector; an emphasis on hard work and education; respect for older people and hierarchy, as well as other family members; non-expression of feelings and emotions and a de-emphasis on sport and recreation’ (Hibbins, 2005:173) in the formation of his informants’ gender identity. At the same time, he also suggests a list of symbolic indicators such as educational qualifications, good job, hard work and wealth as markers to secure their masculinity. He concludes with an emphasis on the importance of understanding Chinese masculinities with a focus on the acknowledgement of the socioeconomic status of the research participants. In contrast to Hibbins’ work, my research focuses on a group of working class internal migrants, which is explored in Chapter Five and Six.

2.5 Conclusion

I critically engage with the above literatures in order to address a primary aim of the research, the absence of Chinese rural men - one of the largest population movements in the contemporary world - as gendered beings migrating to the city. The chapter

acknowledges the important contributions of Chinese traditional sociological understandings of rural-urban labour migration and Chinese feminist scholarship on the gendering of migration and identity formation among ‘Dagong Mei’ (female migrant workers). Western theories of men and masculinities are seen as an important starting point for my research project. Most important is the new British feminist scholarship, which offers major insights into culturally-based class/gender dynamics in contemporary (female) lives. Building on this scholarship, enables me to explore male peasant workers’ identity formation through a critical investigation of the substantive issues of gender and class.

Reay (1998:272) maintains that ‘class is a complicated mixture of the material, the discursive, psychological predispositions and sociological dispositions that quantitative work on class location and class identity cannot hope to capture.’ In response to the recreation of class in a post-Mao Chinese society (explored in chapter 1) and current literature portraying Chinese rural-urban migrant workers as a new working class, it is of particular importance to capture an understanding of male rural-urban migrant workers’ position in society through their subjectivities, meanings and creative agency that goes beyond the economic determinist accounts of earlier studies of stratification of migration. This is further investigated in the next chapter, focusing upon the dynamic interplay of theory, method and data collection.

Chapter Three

Research Design

3.1 Transformation of Research Question: Exploring Methodology

- 3.1:1 Initial research question: the ‘making’ and ‘taking’ of research questions
- 3.1:2 Current research question: autonomous validity of methodology

3.2 The Methodological Perspective of the Research

3.3 The Dynamic Interplay of Theory, Method and Data Collection

- 3.3:1 Representation and discursively constituted gendered identities
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3.4 Research in Practice

- 3.4:1 Locating the research: going to the place where I grew up
- 3.4:2 Research methods: discourse analysis, life histories and participant observation
 - 3.4:2-1 *Discourse analysis: seeing male peasant workers through public eyes*
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 - 3.4:2-2(1) Social hierarchy in the field
 - 3.4:2-2(2) Being a man in the field
- 3.4:3 Data analysis
- 3.4:4 Reflexivity
- 3.4:5 Ethical issues

3.5 Conclusion

3.1 Transformation of Research Question: Exploring Methodology

This chapter sets out two main inter-connecting purposes. Firstly, I locate my research project within a post-positivist methodological tradition deploying a critical perspective (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). Bev Skeggs' (1997) definition of methodology provides a productive point of departure for a critical theory-led empirical research project. She suggests:

‘Methodology is itself theory. It is a theory of methods which informs a range of issues from who to study, how to study, which institutional practices to adopt (such as interpretative practices), how to write and which knowledge to use.’ (Skeggs, 1997:17)

Secondly, this chapter provides a detailed exploration of the research design, data collection and how the research was carried out. The research question is to critically explore Chinese male peasant workers' identity formation within the post-reform modernization era. As outlined in the Introduction the research objectives are:

1. To develop a critical understanding of the current Chinese social order as a result of the transformation from a Maoist to post-Mao era.
2. To critically engage with Chinese male peasant workers' narratives located within the family and the workplace.
3. To contribute to an understanding of the impact of gender and class formation on peasant workers.
4. To critically investigate public representations of male peasant workers.
5. To contribute to current intellectual debates about Chinese modernization.

At this point I wish to describe how I shifted from an earlier research question, as a result of my methodological engagement with Chinese male peasant workers' narratives, which in turn helped shape the development of my theoretical position.

3.1:1 Initial research question: the ‘making’ and ‘taking’ of research questions

Young (1971:1-2) refers to Seeley’s (1966) important distinction between the making and taking of research problems, arguing that sociologists have historically tended to take officially defined problems as their starting point. In so doing, he claims, they failed to examine the assumptions of official definitions. A major issue for Young is the need to make one’s own research problems. He suggests that this may include critically addressing official definitions and in the process making explicit the questions that are and are not asked. More recently, for British theorists this has been a central issue concerning methodological rigour and transparency in conducting research on migration to move beyond government definitions of social issues, while interrogating the assumptions of policy makers (Brah et al, 2000). When I began my research I shared the limitation to which Young refers. I took the dominant assumptions shared by the Chinese government, policy makers and academics, about how to research what is officially currently perceived as a major social problem, male peasant workers’ rural-urban migration. Hence I adopted a traditional sociological focus on the social stratification and integration of migrant men.

3.1:2 Current research question: autonomous validity of methodology

Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (1998) have suggested that however significant theoretical and substantive issues are, they do not determine one’s methodological stance. In my research project, an increasing understanding of the importance of epistemology and more specifically epistemologically privileging the peasant workers’ narratives enabled me to make a fundamental break with my original research problem. The research

moved beyond an investigation reproducing a research question generated by government and academic elites, to a critical exploration generating new responsible knowledge (Skeggs, 1997). The chapter maps out this research trajectory. It records the transformation from an overly structuralist perspective on the social stratification and integration of Chinese (male) peasant workers, to an investigation of the dynamic interplay between structure and agency in producing a broader understanding of Chinese male peasant workers' identity formation. Importantly, the transformation of my research question directed me to critically engage with current debates on neoliberal modernization and modernity.

3.2 The Methodological Perspective of the Research

In western societies over the last few decades, the social sciences and humanities have witnessed an explosion of texts debating questions about researching gender (Hirsch and Fox Keller, 1990; Marchand, and Runyan, 2000). Of particular importance has been the challenge to enlightenment-based philosophical questions about, science, truth and power and accompanying notions of validity and reliability. More recently, these debates have intensified in research on men and masculinities. Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003) suggest that Guba's (1990) three-part model of fundamental research questions is currently useful in examining the research process by investigating how knowledge is produced. They set out the three questions as follows:

‘First, is the ontological question: what is there that can be known – what is knowable? It deals with the assumptions one is willing to make about the nature of reality. Second, is the epistemological question: what is knowledge and what is the relationship of the knower to the known? The assumption that one makes about how knowledge is produced depends upon how one conceives reality (ontology). Third is the methodological question: how do we find things

out? How this is answered depends on what decisions have been made about the above ontological and epistemological questions.’ (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003: 102)

Marsh and Furlong (2002), in writing about ontology and epistemology, suggest that:

‘Each social scientist’s orientation to their subject is shaped by their ontological and epistemological position. Most often those positions are implicit rather than explicit, but, regardless of whether they are acknowledged, they shape the approach to theory and the methods which the social scientist utilizes.’ (Marsh and Furlong, 2002:17)

Above, I refer to the need to shift from *taking* to *making* the research question. When I began my research I shared not only the dominant political conception of rural-urban migration but also its implicit ontological position. From a political common-sense positivist stance, peasant workers were officially assumed to be a fixed social phenomenon who were essentially different from the established urban population. As a consequence, they were seen as being located at the base of the modern urban social hierarchy. The conventional response of social researchers was to address this essential difference of being (Marsh and Furlong, 2002: 18), adopting structuralist explanatory accounts of stratification and integration. During the research, which I came to see as a dynamic process, I shifted away from this position to explicitly identify with an interpretivist ontological stance that acknowledges that the social world and social being are actively produced, that social action is meaningful and the need to search for actors’ subjective interpretations of their social practices. There is a long intellectual European tradition including Weber’s concept of *Verstehen*, phenomenology, hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism that have provided this alternative philosophical framework to positivism. For example, Schutz (1962) highlights what differentiates researching the natural and social world.

‘The world of nature as explored by the natural scientist does not ‘mean’ anything to molecules, atoms and electrons. But the observational field of the

social scientist – social reality – has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the beings living, acting, and thinking within it. By a series of common-sense constructs they have pre-selected and pre-interpreted this world which they experience as the reality of their daily lives. It is these thought objects of theirs which determine their behaviour by motivating it. The thought objects constructed by the social scientist, in order to grasp this social reality, have to be founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thinking of men, living their daily life within the social world.’ (Schutz, 1962: 59)

This interpretivist position is marked by an interest in understanding, meaning, subjectivity and agency located within specific contexts. Most importantly, this enabled me to capture the male peasant workers’ meanings of their migrant urban lives and more specifically, their creativity in response to a cultural tension between tradition and modernity within the post-Mao modernization period. In the fixed world of elite commentators and policy makers, modernity displaces tradition as a natural process of political progress and ‘getting rich’. Such commentators operate with the legacy of positivism that continues to be dominant across the social sciences, politics, the media and popular culture. Social science is expected to produce solutions to structuralist-based social problems, such as the projected problem of rural-urban migration and the accompanying dysfunctional peasant workers. The peasant workers provided evidence of a more complex social world in which they actively deployed traditional cultural forms, such as the family based on Confucian principles, to remake ‘modern’ lives in the city. An interpretivist position makes clear that this social complexity cannot be discovered by implementing a positivist approach that assumes an equivalence between the natural and social world in terms of data collection and explanation.

Given my anti-foundationalist position, the epistemological perspective I adopted for this research project is critical interpretivism or critical constructivism, which informed a qualitative exploration of Chinese male peasant workers’ identity formation within

particular historical and material conditions of the modernization project (Alcoff and Potter, 1993; Bryman, 2001). In turn, this methodological stance pointed to the importance of developing a theoretical-led empirical research study that epistemologically privileged the male peasant workers' narratives.

The chapter adopts a set of qualitative methods to achieve the research objectives outlined earlier. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) suggesting a path for qualitative research to follow in the production of knowledge, maintain that there needs to be an emphasis:

‘more on interpretation and reflection—in relation not only to the object of study but also to the researchers themselves and their political, ideological, meta-theoretical and linguistic context’ (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000:241).

The main qualitative methods I chose to carry out research in the field were based on life history interviews, participant observation and discourse analysis of public representations. My intention was not merely to capture a descriptive representation of Chinese male peasant workers and their life experience through the lens of masculinity. Rather, through critical interpretation, it was to examine how they are culturally produced through public representations and how they actively construct their mobile identities moving beyond official images of dislocated masculinities.

Shifting to an interpretivist position in carrying out research on male peasant workers was highly productive in discovering the meanings and feelings that the men attached to their migrant rural-urban journeys. This methodological shift was particularly salient as the men were in the process of re-inventing themselves within conditions of rapid global transformations associated with the post-reform modernization era.

3.3 The Dynamic Interplay of Theory, Method and Data Collection

Mac an Ghail (1993:149) maintains the importance of the interrelation between methodology, data and theory in research. He argues that: 'research activity should not be a static but rather a dialectical process, with methodology, data and theory informing each other'. Within the tradition of British Cultural Studies, Gray (2003:22) argues that 'social and symbolic worlds are to be known not through some prescribed, fixed and 'logical' method (as proposed by the natural sciences, for example), but they are to be discovered by attending to many levels of practice through which meaning is generated, within particular social and cultural settings'. Williams (1993:6) notes that 'every human society has its own shape, its own purpose, its own meanings'. In other words, making sense of Chinese male peasant workers is most productively achieved through understanding that their meanings in relation to culture and experience is unstable and more complex than existing public representations or common sense suggest.

On reflection, it is difficult to capture my methodological apprenticeship without it appearing as an overly rationalist, well planned linear process. In reality, it was experienced at the time in terms of confusions, messiness and major shifts in how I was seeing the social world and more particularly, how I was seeing the social world of the peasant workers, which itself was in the process of major transformation. What is important to stress here was that early on as I listened to the men's narratives, I began to realize how significant their self-representations were for my developing research project.

More formally, adopting an interpretivist position with its focus on understanding and meaning directed me to develop my theoretical framework and conceptual understanding of key terms, including identity, culture and representation. For Hall,

‘identities are never unified and, in late modern times, they are increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular, but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices, and positions’ (1996a: 4). Identity is a ‘meeting place’ (see, Hall, 1996a; Skeggs, 1997; Kehily, 2002), where the way of living and the discourse that positions us meet, alongside both correspondences and tensions. The theoretical framework of the thesis is informed by a British Cultural Studies tradition with a focus on culture and cultural constructed identity influenced by a poststructuralist understanding of discourse and knowledge. Equally important, the thesis builds on a British Cultural Studies informed new feminism with a focus on ‘experience’ and ‘habitus’ in the formation of gender and class identity that is explored in the following section.

In examining culture, Hall (1981) defines it as the study of

‘both the meanings and values which “develop” from given historical conditions and relationships, through which (people) handle and respond to the conditions of existence; and the lived traditions and practices through which those ‘understandings’ are expressed and in which they are embodied.’ (Hall, 1981:26)

Williams (2009) identifies three categories in defining culture. Firstly, he defines culture as ‘the “ideal”, in which culture is a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal values’ (ibid.: 32); secondly, ‘culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded’ (ibid.); thirdly, culture is socially defined as ‘a description of a particular way of life’ (ibid.). In order to make sense of Chinese male peasant workers’ lives, we need to consider both the structural as well as the cultural contextualization in the identity formation of this new social category. Within this context, this research on Chinese male workers’ identity formation seeks to study the

constraints and creativity of self representations of ‘a particular class-based way of life’ of this group of people as well as the ‘signifying practices’ of public narratives that culturally produce dominant images of the migrant men.

3.3:1 Representation and discursively constituted gendered identities

As suggested in Chapter Two, a major development during the past 30 years in studies of rural-urban labour migration is the formation of the social category and identity of ‘peasant workers’. This group of people have been defined and categorised by the government and national elites as a structurally disadvantaged group. The concept of peasant worker is constituted by representations through a series of official public narratives. Within current policy making on development, a dominant public representation of peasant workers is that they are highly marginalized. Alongside this, feminist research through the accounts of rural migrant women has also developed a structural explanation of social stratification and gender marginalization through their investigation of institutional barriers, such as the household registration system, the workplace and Confucian familial patriarchal culture. An indicated above an interpretivist position enables us to critique the limitations of the shared assumptions of these political and academic accounts that underplay subjectivity, meaning and agency while projecting images that operate within an oppositional logic of established urban dwellers as stable ‘selves’ and peasant workers as marginalised/dislocated ‘others’¹. Hence, it is important to address the complex process of ‘othering’ in contemporary China, in order to make sense of peasant workers’ structural position before we attempt

¹ At the same time, post-structural feminists tend to highlight an agented resistance among these women living and working in the urban spaces.

to make sense of their subjective positioning as individual and collective subjects within a shifting social class structure (Said, 1978). Hence, it is of importance to problematize the representations of (male) peasant workers currently circulating within dominant public and academic discourses as part of the process of understanding their identity formation.

Stuart Hall (1997:28) defines representation as ‘the production of meaning through language...we use signs, organized into languages of different kinds, to communicate meaningful with others.’ He maintains that we give meaning to objects through representing them, whose process is achieved through ‘the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them’ (Hall, 1997:3). Giving them meanings through narration, we impose an identity onto these labour migrants as ‘peasant workers’. The practice of representation, according to Hall (1997:225) is a process of stereotyping, which is based on a binary form of representation, distinguishing us and them,

‘...people who are in any way significantly different from the majority - “them” rather than “us” - are frequently exposed to this binary form of representation. They seem to be represented through sharply opposed, polarized binary extremes - good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling-because-different / compelling-because-strange-and exotic. And they are often required to be both things at the same time!’ (Hall, 1997:229)

Although current literatures have emphasized the marginalization of peasant workers in Chinese society, this process of ‘othering’ or ‘discrimination’ is not static or inevitable. Rather, it is discursively constructed within particular historical conditions and different social and political contexts, in which meanings of represented objects are the product

of power relations and are subject to change. Hall's understanding of stereotyping resonates with current public representations of peasant workers (which I systematically discuss in chapter 4), who are simultaneously represented as both 'national hero' and 'modernization loser'. In Grillo's (1985:2) study of the representation of immigrants in urban France, he notes that 'if there is "representation" of problems, there is also a problem of "representation"'. Such contradictory representations of Chinese peasant workers are of significance in understanding the material conditions within which they are positioned. Such material conditions comprise an ideological transformation from the Maoist to post-Mao modernization. Therefore, this process is more complex than the 'othering' of a low status social group, due to the political continuity between the former communist state regime in relation to the recognition of the high value of the working class and a neoliberal market-oriented economic policy since late 1970s. The contemporary modernization project in terms of economic reform introduced by Deng in China in late 1970s and early 1980s began to change the ideological system set up by Mao, as I outlined in Chapter One. Yan (2003; 2008) in her ethnographical research on rural domestic female workers argues that the meanings emanating from the differences between rural and urban settings serve to condemn the failure of the Maoist development policy. In Hall's (1997:5) poststructuralist critique of materialist accounts, he stresses that 'meaning is thought to be produced - constructed - rather than simply "found" '. Meanings are produced or constituted variously through language within different discourses, in which power and knowledge are created to formulate the language and representation of communication. According to Foucault (1989:49) discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.'

This thesis emphasises the historicity in the formation of discourse within the context of the current historical development from pre-reform to the reform period. Located within

a post-Mao transitional period of economic reform, a post-structuralist account of a 'discursive turn' or 'cultural turn' provides a critical approach to understand Chinese peasant workers' identity formation. Therefore, the social exclusion of peasant workers can be understood as not just a historical given 'reality'. Rather, it is discursively constructed, partly as a reflection of the success of the current modernization project and accompanying characteristics of a transitional China from the Maoist planned economy to the post-Mao globally-inflected market economy.

At the same time, the public representation of peasant workers is not just about distinguishing between us/them, urban/rural, modern/underdeveloped, it is also about power relations between such dichotomies operating within current dominant discourses. Addressing the additional dimension of gender in the process of representing class-based peasant workers (as others) in light of the 'cultural turn', the notion of the discursive formation of identity in terms of social class within current economic modernization conditions can also be read as gendered. As Said (1985:103) notes, the Orient was narratively projected by the west as feminine in the process of othering.

Located within current material conditions of a globally-based market economy, uneven economic and social development between rural and urban areas initiated by Chinese modernization and an economic development policy of 'let some regions and some people get rich first' (see chapter 1) results in unequal economic power relations between provinces under the state's dual institutional system. Hall (1997:261) argues that power 'not only constrains and prevents: it is also productive. It produces new discourses, new kinds of knowledge, new objects of knowledge, it shapes new practices and institutions.' Alongside producing the concept of the migrant peasant worker, the Chinese modernization project has also produced intensified regional unequal power

relations between rural/urban areas, as represented in the North/South and West/East divisions. Importantly, Spivak in her interview with Yan (2007) maintains that,

‘all the Asian countries are not part of the global south. Each of the countries has a north in the south in themselves. And the north in the south is in fact more committed to the global game than it is to the welfare of the state space.’ (Yan, 2007:438)

Such acknowledgment resonates with the unequal geographical relations within China. Its effects are captured by Schein’s (1997, 1999) and Jansson’s (2003, 2007) notion of internal orientalism. This concept provides a productive explanatory frame to make sense of contemporary Chinese social divisions between rural and urban populations and the current status and representation of these two different geographical communities. Jansson (2003, 2007) investigating the spatial construction of southern ‘others’ within the US adopts the concept of internal Orientalism, maintaining that,

‘From a geographic perspective, internal orientalism represents a discourse that operates within the boundaries of a state, a discourse that involves the othering of a (relatively) weak region by a more powerful region (or regions) within the state’ (Jansson, 2003:296).

This corresponds with the current rural/urban dichotomy within post-Mao China. It is of central importance in understanding the social positioning of rural peasant workers living in the cities.

Geographic differences as a result of prioritizing development preferences also have connotations for gender difference. Schein’s (1997) paper on ‘Gender and Internal Orientalism in China’ adopts a western concept of ethnic minority in studying Chinese ethnic minority groups within China. She carries out ethnographic field work in Kaili, comparing an ethnic minority village in southeast Guizhou, with a majority population of Miao nationality. Adopting Said’s (1978) explanation of the sexualisation of the Orient by the erotic representation of oriental women, Schein (1997) argues that the

post-Mao ethnic minority cultural revival is attached to the desire of establishing a hegemonic *Han* ethnic, masculine, dominated culture, which is dialectically produced through the media and tourist construction of backward, feminised, minority others. As she argues:

‘...minorities were represented chiefly by rural women, while Han observers appeared characteristically as male sophisticates’ (Schein, 1997:70).

Within the context of modernization and current research on female migrant workers, the main analytical frame around gender and rural-urban labour migration continues to be influenced by the success of the Chinese feminist movement and other western feminists, who explore rural women’s experience in urban settings in relation to patriarchal domination. At the same time, I argue that the notion of internal Orientalism provides an analytical language in which Chinese male peasant workers appear as a problematic gendered group of people in which both rural women and men are positioned as part of a process of internal orientalism in the current Chinese modernity project. I will discuss this further in Chapter Four in terms of the cultural production of Chinese male peasant workers in relation to dominant public discourses.

3.3:2 Habitus and the relational role of the self

In understanding the male peasant workers’ self identity formation, this thesis endorses Skeggs’ (1997) argument against the taken for granted assumption that all women share a feminist standpoint. She maintains that:

‘Knowledge of feminism, however, was useful for interpreting bad experiences. This is where feminism has a particularly useful function to name problems, experiences, oppressions and imagine changes...The up-side of this could be that most women have bad experiences for which feminism can provide a collectivized explanation. But the problem is how many women see or hear

these explanatory frameworks or come into contact with feminist agencies.’
(Skeggs, 1997:157)

In respect to Skeggs’ (1997) perspective, I am also sceptical about some feminist research on Chinese gender and rural-urban labour migration examined in Chapter Two, which assumes that traditional familial values based on a Confucian patriarchal structure are simply obstacles to women’s pursuit of modern life styles. Rather, traditional values may serve *both* to discriminate against women, while at the same time acting as resource or an element of their social and cultural capitals in the construction of their modern identities within new social spaces. What is needed is a more reflexive representation of peasant workers by locating empirical research within their own culture and being reflexive about using western concepts by addressing the theoretical dichotomy of western concepts and non-western empirical work. Therefore, I do not adopt a standpoint from which to speak exclusively of the ‘bitterness’ of the male migrants’ experiences or to praise their significant contribution to the motherland. Rather I critically explore these rural men’s narratives of how they make sense of their lives in response to the state’s modernization project in the new urban space of the neo-liberal market economy. However, this is a highly complex issue and my own theoretical frames are dependent on American and European positions. In other words, my criticism of those engaged in this field of analysis who are mainly feminists is at the same time a criticism of my own position. In this intellectual process, I acknowledge that strands of feminism are a major theoretical and political resource for my own work.

My research project is informed by British new feminism with its focus on ‘experience’ and its adaption of Bourdieu’s concepts of: capital metaphors, field and habitus to make sense of self-represented identities (Skeggs, 1997; McNay, 1999). In terms of theoretical language, these characteristics of habitus as social and relational critically

challenge the dominant understandings of self identity formation in late modernity, as I explained in Chapter Two. This critical approach to identification and social practices developed by new feminism in terms of exploring working class women's 'experience' also provides a useful analytical vocabulary to explore Chinese male peasant workers' construction of their subjectivities in the formation of social 'class', as a group located within contemporary Chinese society. At the same time, it allows an awareness of the cultural specificity that emerges from their 'experience' as recorded in their narratives of rural-urban labour migration.

Of particular importance, the concept of habitus overcomes the problem of structural determinism and is compatible with a traditional Chinese notion of the self in terms of its fluidity and relationality. For example, Tam (1995) while problematizing the relation between Chinese and western modernity, refers to the traditional Chinese self as a relational role-self, summed up in Confucian thought² that a person is an individual who lives to fulfil the duty expected of him, which is expressed in familial and social relationships as son, brother, husband/partner and father, rather than a person as an independent individual self (Tam, 1995; Gao, 1996). Within a Chinese context, the formation of self-identity depends on the fulfillment of their given social roles in social relations. This can be illustrated through the translation of sex and gender in the Chinese language. For example, in order to distinguish 'sex' and 'gender' in Chinese, 'gender' is translated as 'social gender' (shehui xingbie: literally means 'social sex difference'), with an emphasis on its social and relational characteristics. Brownell and Wasserstrom (2002: 25-26) acknowledge X. Li's (1999) understanding of Chinese gender that "it would be redundant to introduce the notion of gender (shehui xingbie)

² Tam (1995) refers to Confucian Analects: 'Let the ruler be ruler, the minister, minister, the father, father, and the son, son'.

[literally, social sex difference] to the Chinese language, since *nü* [woman/female] and *nan* [man/male] are already understood as social, not natural, beings.”

Song (2006) notes that Chinese culture uses ‘yin/yang’³ to interpret the notions of ‘man/woman’ in gender divisions. However, yin/yang are not equivalent to feminine/masculine. Song (2006:158) maintains that the oppositional dichotomy of ‘man/woman’ emerges into Chinese culture alongside the pursuit of modernity. ‘He’ and ‘She’ in Chinese characters are deployed from the west since the early 1900s. He also maintains that the characteristic of ‘yin/yang’ enables an unfixed power relationship between the two within different social relations. According to Song, yin/yang represents an individual’s position within the context of social networks. In other words, to define something as ‘yang’, there needs to be a relational ‘yin’ in a particular social relation. Therefore, gender identity in a Chinese context is a relational role identity which enables fluidity, relativity and possibility rather than a structural determined role by society which is fixed and rigid. It has compatibility with ‘habitus’ for its creativity that is designed ‘to account for the fluid, open-ended and incomplete nature of social action’ (Krais, 2006:129). Meanwhile, new feminist accounts claim that ‘habitus’ produces a more dynamic embodiment than Foucault’s notion of the self (McNay, 1999). The latter has been deployed by some Chinese scholars in analysing the experience of Chinese female peasant workers (Pun, 2005). McNay (1999:95) argues against Foucault’s ‘technologies of self’ in that it ‘fails to think the materiality of the body and thus vacillates between determinism and voluntarism.’ The consideration of materiality is captured in Bourdieu’s analysis and the Chinese notion of self as relational.

³ Song (2006:162) explains ‘yin/yang’ refers to two sides of a mountain, the southern side facing the sun as *yang*, the northern side as *yin*. It becomes the foundation of sustaining Confucian social order in which *yang* has power over *yin*, represented by husband to wife, for instance as a Confucian gender norm.

Furthermore, the Chinese relational role self also operates through internalizing cultural values (i.e. Confucian father-son relations, see Zhao, 2007), but it never restrains creativity and possibility in different social contexts. Its compatibility with Bourdieu's concept of habitus highlights its difference to the concept of role in sex role theory. According to Kraus and Williams (2000),

‘Unlike the concept of the role, the concept of the habitus is aimed at an incorporated structure; it is not conceived of as a “social imposition”—behavioural expectations imposed from outside, like expectation, values and norms—in the medium of the “pure mind”. A further difference from the role concept is that the habitus, as a component of a living organism, works as a living system—according to a systemic and not a mechanistic logic. Thus, it is by no means a “program of action” in the sense of an internalized, finite number of fixed rules or “values”’ (Kraus and Williams, 2000:57).

As a relational concept, habitus is lived out in different ‘fields’ (McNay 1999). It resonates with Song's (2006) understanding of the dynamics of yin/yang and China's relational role self. For instance, Song (2006) uses an example to illustrate the fluidity and relativity of yin/yang: a minister is characterized as ‘yin’ in front of the king. But a minister is also ‘yang’ to his wife at home (Song, 2006:163). In this case, social relations in located contexts are of importance in the formation of the gendered self that are established through external relations not internal predispositions, as yin or yang cannot exist outside social relations. Therefore, the Chinese concept of gender does not necessarily reinforce the domination and oppression between the two genders, but is embedded with the relativity and fluidity associated with the notion of yin/yang. It is important to emphasize these social interactions and social relations that are lived out by an ‘embodied habitus’ or ‘relational role self’ within different social fields, such as the family and the workplace, and what enables their positioning in social actions and the meaning and the construction of their relational role self identity. In Chapter Five

and Chapter Six, I systematically discuss Chinese male peasant workers' identity formation in relation to these social networks.

3.4 Research in Practice

In this section, I address practical and technical issues that emerged during the fieldwork. The main empirical aspect of the research project was my field work in China, which was carried out between 2007 and 2008, mainly during the summer and winter periods, alongside other occasional visits to the field to carry out further investigation with particular individuals. The fieldwork was designed to enable a detailed understanding of the male peasant workers' identity formation in an urban context. I began my field work six months before I paid a visit to China by contacting my friends and their families in order to gain permission to access the 'field' (i.e. factories, families) so as to obtain potential interview opportunities. From the beginning of the research project I started collecting media and government reports on Chinese peasant workers. However, carrying out research in China is never an easy or smooth task that can be achieved single-handedly. It is a test of the researcher's communication skills, as well as cultural and political awareness. A specific term to describe the nature of Chinese social relations is *Guanxi*, which refers to a personal relationship or network which is built on pre-existing social connections and contacts in terms of friendship, classmates and relatives (see chapter 1 section 1.5:3). This was of central importance in carrying out my empirical work.

3.4:1 Locating the research: going to the place where I grew up

As I set out to study male peasant workers, one of the difficulties facing me was where I was going to locate my research and how I would gain access to the field. Before I decided the destination of my research, I was thinking about locating it in some big cities in Guangdong provinces, such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen that conventionally are seen as the major destinations of peasant workers in southern China. However, there were reasons of finance and limited social contacts in these big cities that led me to consider other choices. I chose Shantou as my research location due to my familiarity with the city in which I grew up, the distinctive local culture as well as the nature of its economic and industrial structure that might provide a range of accounts of rural-urban labour migration. Economically, it is a relatively developed coastal city in the south of China. People who live there have their own dialect that is different to the Chinese official language—Mandarin. At the early stage of the post-Mao reform, Shantou was selected as one of the five special economic zones that benefited from the privileged economic development policy with an increasing number of private sectors. Therefore, it attracts thousands of migrant labours ‘to look for their fortune’. They tend to work in the service sector or private factories due to the city’s industrial structure that mainly comprises of manufacturing and light industries such as, textiles, garments, chemicals, toys and handicraft and other service sectors, according to official statistics in the Shantou Statistical Yearbook 2008 (SBST, 2008). Importantly, the location of this research means that that the male peasant workers are likely to be involved in non-conventional men’s occupations, which serve to challenge dominant public representations of them, as working in the construction and mining industries.

From November 2006 to January 2007, I conducted a questionnaire survey in some local factories, streets, restaurants and railway stations, where most peasant workers

gather. The aim of carrying out the questionnaire was not to obtain statistical data for further quantitative research, but rather for me to get a sense of peasant workers' lives, while preparing interviews that I carried out later (Bryman, 2001). From the questionnaire, I realized that it was impossible to ask the peasant workers direct questions about gender, for example, what it meant to be a man. Hence, to ask them to do further questionnaires was not a wise option since I would not gain any further information. More positively, the questionnaire provided me with general themes that were explored in the life-history approach I developed. Importantly, this mixed-method approach also enabled me to cross-check data obtained from the life-histories, thus addressing issues of validity associated with qualitative work by limiting potential bias (Silverman, 1993; Ho, 1998; Maxwell, 2002).

The main research fieldwork was undertaken during the summer and winter vacations of 2007 and 2008. Most importantly, I needed to make contact with my 'Guanxi' network that was based on the connections of friendships and other forms of interpersonal relationships. I will address the ethical issues involved later in this chapter. In a western context, this would be equivalent to research gatekeepers. I received permission from my friends' families to carry out intensive interviews and observations in their families' factories. The only conditions were to keep the factories anonymous and not to cause any unnecessary difficulties within the factories. Alongside accessing labour intensive factories, I realized that there was another group of migrants who could be a major resource for my research. People working on the street and in residential areas as tricycle riders, community cleaners, security guards and other self-employed peasant workers, who could be easily identified as peasant workers as they spoke Mandarin that local people did not usually speak in their daily lives. By the end of the fieldwork, I had collected in-depth interviews with 28 male peasant workers (Appendix

I) across different generations, ranging from ages 17-48, and from different parts of China, who lived and worked in Shantou, with or without their families.

3.4:2 Research methods: discourse analysis, life histories and participant observation

In carrying out my data collection within the field, I deployed multiple qualitative research methods, including discourse analysis, life histories and participant observation. I explored how the discourse of modernization through government and media representations played a hegemonic role in influencing the construction of images of the 'Nong Min Gong'. Discourse analysis of current media coverage of Chinese peasant workers enabled me to locate the research within a contemporary context, addressing changing power relations in different historical contexts and how meanings of peasant workers have changed during the current historical transition (Fairclough, 1989, 1995). Meanwhile, during the field work, I epistemologically privileged the men's own accounts in terms of their life histories of moving from rural to urban space. Connell maintains that the 'life-history method offers a way to explore the politics of change in contemporary masculinity' (Connell, 1991:141). At the same time, she (ibid.:143) argues that 'for the analysis of masculinity, life-history method is particularly relevant because of its capacity to reveal social structures, collectivities, and institutional change at the same time as personal life.' Within this ethnographic approach, I also actively participated in their personal lives, aiming to obtain first hand data through my own observation and critical reflections in the field, thus critiquing earlier positivist accounts of peasant workers' social world (Atkinson, 1990, 1992). The interaction of these qualitative research methods aims to provide a more critical and

comprehensive understanding of male peasant workers' experiences of male peasant workers in urban spaces.

3.4:2-1 Discourse analysis: seeing male peasant workers through public eyes

While the research fieldwork was mainly based on the respondents' narratives, it was also important to address the wider contemporary discursive framework, in order to make sense of the dominant public stereotypical portrayal of male peasant workers. Masculinities need to be analysed in relation to a whole discursive practice (Roussel & Downs, 2007:180) in which identities are produced. Skeggs (1997:29) maintains that 'knowing is always mediated through the discourses available to use to interpret and understand our experiences.' The discourse of modernization with Chinese characteristics provides a vital resource for the construction of 'Nong Min Gong' (peasant worker) through the media and government policy. This is the discursive 'reality' that I explored in relation to the construction of Chinese male peasant workers through the public gaze.

To make sense of the discursive formation of migrating masculinities, during the process of research, I collected newspaper and internet reports of Chinese peasant workers and discursively analyzed the public designation of peasant workers and what people regard as common sense⁴ images within the context of modernization (Fairclough, 1989; Thompson, 1998). I also interviewed some urban residents about how they perceived peasant workers, critically addressing whether they had internalized the dominant public designation of peasant workers. I used these media representations

⁴ Antonio Gramsci (1971) argues that common sense is the result of the power of the political and the economic circulating within society.

to map out the cultural and social conditions within which Chinese male peasant workers are portrayed. This also enabled me later to analyze the migrant men's narratives to see if they recognized themselves within these national-based representations. The public formation of migrating masculinities, which will be presented in Chapter Four, became a resource for further critical analysis within the context of the men's own narrative accounts.

3.4:2-2 Life histories and participant observation

Informed by my epistemological position, this research adopts a multi-method approach, including life histories, participant observation, besides discourse analysis. Although I had prepared questions before my fieldwork visit to China, during the first few interviews, I realized that my questions appeared to be little different from a questionnaire, providing the opportunity for a face to face question and answer session. Due to our mutual unfamiliarity with each other, I had little sense of gaining access to a broader narrative about the migrant men's lives beyond simple closed responses to my questions. I soon realized that this initial research practice might lead to misinterpretation throughout the research period due to a lack of mutual communication and understanding being established. Therefore, at an early stage of my interviews, rather than asking them specific questions that I had designed, I decided to participate in their daily lives to build up mutual trust while deploying a life history approach, informed by my participant observation, thus aiming to place their own narratives at the centre of the study. Finn (1979) explains the advantages of an ethnographic approach. He argues that:

‘The techniques used were particularly suited to record this level and have a sensitivity to subjective meanings and values as well as an ability to represent and interpret symbolic articulations, practices and forms of cultural production. In particular the ethnographic account, without always knowing how, can allow a degree of activity, creativity and human agency within the object of study to come through into the analysis.’ (Finn, 1979: 6)

Participating in their workplaces, attending their barbeque parties and other social activities enabled me to infer meanings by understanding these contexts. Thus helping me to make sense of their social interaction, while building mutual trust for further exploration of their life histories (Mills, 2001; McCormack, 2004). In retrospect my initial questions mostly focussed on personal issues associated with the men’s migration from their rural homes to the city. The combination of life histories and participant observation enabled me to gain a critical understanding of the interweaving of the ‘personal’ and ‘material/structural conditions’. At the same time, this methodological combination enabled me to gain an understanding of the spatial and temporal aspects of how these men were responding to the government’s modernization project. This research approach is supported by other ethnographic work, such as that of Connell (1991), who writes of the difficulties of researching changes in the constitution of masculinity. She highlights the utility of the life history approach which provides information about practices and about contradictions in practice which draw on experience, personal interactions and social practices that are shaped at both a micro and macro social level (Connell, 1991, 143).

Being a Chinese researcher in the context of the government modernization project, it seemed that it was relatively easy for the migrant men to discuss specific difficulties that impacted on their lives in urban China. Participating in their social activities, such as dining with them at the canteen was very useful in breaking down the researcher/urban dweller cultural codes that I carried with me in my interaction with the

men. Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003:112) have critically examined pro-feminist methodology and maintain that ‘the shift to an anti-oppressive research framework invites the operation of particular scripts for the researcher and the research participants. Adopting empowering research methods may simply be a more ethically sensitive way of extracting information from the researched’. With such awareness, I did not ask the migrant men any specific questions in relation to oppressive living conditions that they might be experiencing. Rather, I asked more open-ended questions, for example: ‘Where have you been since you left home? What have you done since you left home?’ in order to enable them to construct their own stories drawing upon a wide range of memories (Giles, 2002; Gray, 2008; Kuhn, 2002; Ryan, 2006). In the remembered accounts of their past, I tried to capture how they constructed their self identities, and the impact of reductive public representations on their own identity-making. Skeggs (2004:119-20) maintains that ‘it is through the telling of the self that social processes of positioning, of value, of moral attribution, are put in to effect as a manifestation and maintenance of difference and distinction.’ This resonated with my work with the migrant men, for whom inventing a ‘new’ urban identity was constrained by material conditions in which they were positioned in public discourses as the lowest status group in the city. Of particular importance, Gray (2008:949) argues that ‘attempts to find more reliable grounds for knowledge claims must be simultaneously located in the interrelated landscapes of feeling, intellect and politics’. Hence, I was interested in documenting not only what the men *thought* but also what they *felt* about their changing urban lives away from home.

When I asked the men why they wished to work in Shantou, their answers were always associated with their family and wider kin. For example, they claimed that: ‘they needed to earn money to support their family’; ‘simply because their relatives were

here' and 'they were just asked to join them'. I also noticed that when I asked them to talk about themselves, they always referred to a relationship within which they were involved. This informed my developing understanding of identity as relational (see section 2.3:2) in a Chinese context. Hence, my empirical work highlighted the need when attempting to generate meanings about Chinese men and masculinities, to locate my questions within their social experience; acknowledging the significance of their daily interaction with others, such as their families, friends and colleagues, as they continually demonstrated. This illustrates the dialectical relationship between theory and empirical work. Originally, deploying western concepts of the self, with their emphasis on individualism did not make sense of the Chinese male life histories that I was recording in the field. Hence, my empirical work became a cultural resource to interrogate western definitions of the self, subjectivity and identity formation (Giddens, 1991, 1992).

More specifically, the life-history accounts and my participant observation experience among the peasant workers served to critique the universalizing tendency of late modernity theorists, such as Giddens (1991, 1992) and Beck (1992), about the project of the self. The men's responses enabled me to inquire further about their social lives, such as their social relations within families and workplaces, where hidden ascribed gender roles and constructed meanings were located. The life history approach enabled me to record the construction and change of their subjectivities through the narration of their experiences in terms of family life (chapter 5) and workplace (chapter 6). Lawler (2002) acknowledging the central part of narratives in research, claims that they:

'are interpretive devices, through which people represent themselves, both to themselves and to others... (they) are a central means with which people connect together past and present, self and other. They do so within the context of cultural narratives which delimit what can be said, what stories can be told, what will

count as meaningful, and what will seem to be nonsensical... they are part of the fabric of the social world.’ (Lawler, 2002: 242–3)

Indeed, their life story narratives further enabled me to capture the men’s emerging urban-based masculinities and their associated meanings in relation to their current location in urban spaces.

Hence, the emphasis on self narration within the life histories epistemologically privileged the men’s accounts of their construction of the self. Osella and Osella’s (2006:569) ethnographic research on stories of migration and modernity from Kerala, South India, maintain that: ‘Life-history narratives forcibly bring us – European interlocutors – into the same space as the tale-tellers, speak of encounters between Indians and Europeans, and urge us to recognize that we live in ‘one world’. They also highlight a potential limitation of this research method and argue that ‘the life-story tends to focus on one individual and on that individual’s own account of his or her experience; it tends to suggest to us the idea of a coherent or continuous self unfolding over time. For these sorts of reasons it has been accused of being variously a Western, modern, or psychoanalytically motivated construction inappropriate to local models of personhood or ways of talking about the self’ (ibid.:572). As indicated above, in my empirical work the life history approach allowed a reflexive position that enabled a critique from within a Chinese context of a western concept of self construction.

Meanwhile, Skeggs (1997), who acknowledges the value of experience as a resource of making knowledge, suggests a conceptual shift from experience as a basis of *being* to experience as complexly productive of *becoming* a knowing subject:

‘It is through the experience of subjective construction that we come to know and be known. This enables the shift to be made from experience as a foundation for knowledge to experience as productive of a knowing subject in which their

identities are continually in production rather than being occupied as fixed.’(Skeggs, 1997:18)

Chapter Five and Chapter Six illustrate that the construction of identity through life narratives is an ongoing process in relation to the movement of rural men into urban spaces. The life history approach captures how both continuity and transformation impacts upon these dislocated men, providing a real sense of the complexity of the contemporary construction of new urban subjectivities in a rapidly changing China.

3.4:2-2(1) Social hierarchy in the field

Interviewing is never an easy task. It requires creating the appropriate conditions and adopting the most productive research techniques that enable interviewees to tell their stories. Jeff Hearn (1987:9) states: “to face other men is to face myself, and vice versa’. It was important for me to be aware of how the male peasant workers made sense of my presence as I interviewed them. The process of interviewing involved a complex interaction in relation to gender, class, age and experience between myself and the migrant men. When I started my research, I was aware of a potential difficulty in conducting interviews with Chinese male peasant workers, which might arise from the fact that we were from different social worlds, marked by different educational backgrounds, economic and social status, as well as generationally specific life experiences. More specifically, there was not a common language between myself as a researcher and the Chinese male peasant workers as interviewees, due to our different social and cultural backgrounds (i.e. regional cultural differences in terms of particular ways of expression) even though we spoke the same language.

Methodology textbooks helped to prepare me for the research field, highlighting the need to address power relations as they are played out between a ‘powerful’ researcher and a ‘less powerful’ researched social group (Bryman, 2001). However, there were specific dynamics operating within a Chinese context that I needed to address while conducting my empirical work. For example, for many male peasant workers the connotation of researcher was either that of government official or a journalist. When you enter a factory or interview a stranger on the street, the ‘performance’ of a researcher is crucial because in your initial interaction, your role as a researcher potentially embodies multiple potential characters, such as, friend of the boss, ‘might-be’ journalist’ or ‘might-be’ government official. There is no doubt that social privilege as a researcher helped me to gain access to potential participants. However, it might also potentially have had negative effects on the quality of the data collection as my privileged position might have acted as a cultural barrier when engaging with male peasant workers about such personal issues, as social and gender identity formation. Hence, I worked hard to ensure was I was seen as trustworthy. Most importantly, time and personal intercommunication eased away the tension that existed at the beginning of my fieldwork. This was a key aspect of the ethical framework I deployed that I will address later in the chapter.

Foucault (1973:331) suggests that in social interaction with others, we are in an “already constructed network of comprehension”. What we make sense of with each other is what is called culture⁵ within the same social structure. This was illustrated in a negative way for me during the fieldwork by the language the men and I used that was sometimes not comprehensible to each other. Tim May (2001:38) maintains that: ‘there

⁵ For Raymond Williams (1983:90), culture refers to ‘a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group.’

is a constant slippage between the language which we use as researchers to understand and explain social life and the meanings which people already employ to get on with the business of everyday life.’ For example, peasant workers used local terms, such as ‘tashi’ to describe their feeling as ‘sure’ and ‘happy’. While working in the field, I adopted a range of colloquial expressions they used in order to develop a friendly approachable and trust-worthy environment for them to explore with me their life histories. This was also productive for further reflection and interpretation. For example, when I transcribed the interviews that I had earlier carried out, I realised I had constantly repeated particular words they used in order to make sure I understood them. In addition, I felt that the most productive way of introducing notions of gender and masculinity into my fieldwork was to insert the concepts into everyday conversations, while talking about their lives in rural and urban spaces with reference to their social relations with their families (as a husbands/partners, fathers or sons) and their friends. From this emerged ‘local contexts, multiple identities and cultural scripts’ (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003: 117), through which conversations were sustained and we made sense of each other.

3.4:2-2(2) Being a man in the field

As a male researcher in the field, I found that many of the male peasant workers were willing to share their life experiences with me. Over time as we established a relationship within the research process, they came to see me as a close male friend, who did not threaten them but displayed respect in ‘just listening’ to the positive and negative aspects of their current lives in relation to migration. During the process, it was also important to ‘act’ locally. For example, by dressing appropriately, in order to limit

the impact of the social status distinctions between the researcher and the researched. I developed a number of practices to achieve this, including joining their weekend barbeques and having lunch with them in the factory canteen in order to build up a sense of friendship. In the following field notes, Ding, one of the male peasant workers expressed his gratitude to me for listening to his personal story. Although I could sense that they treated me as an ‘important’ person that could ‘help’ them, they continued to have a strong sense of ‘their own people’ and ‘people like me’ from outside the inner circle. However, in an anthropological sense, the ‘stranger’ was provided with socially privileged access to the men’s emotional worlds. For example, the role of researcher elicited narratives that were not heard by others.

Guo Jintian (44 years old): ‘I am so embarrassed talking to you like this (as he cries in front of me when he talks about his daughter). I am very grateful you are here to listen to me. You wouldn’t talk like this to your family, or *Laoxiang*. They wouldn’t understand it or they might laugh at you if you say something personal...Sometimes it is just not good to say something personal to other people.’

Within qualitative work, gender is one of the major manifestations of power relations between the researcher and the researched that raises questions about validity (Lather, 1993, 1995; Maxwell, 2002, 2005). Reading the literature on validity and qualitative work was important in making me aware of the contextual specificity that helped to produce my ‘findings’, that did not constitute the ‘truth’ of these men’s lives (Lather, 1993; Watson, 2006). In other words, my account was just one of many potential accounts that might be produced by an ethnographic study.

For example, if I had been a female researcher, there would have been a different account of migration from the male peasant workers. However, working with male participants from a male researcher’s perspective does not necessarily make it easier than for a female researcher, as some feminist scholars assume. For example, Barbara

Pini (2005:214) raises the difficulties a female researcher encounters while undertaking qualitative interviews with rural men. She hypothesises that a male researcher 'would have been more easily accommodated at informal all male (or largely) male social activities' that she found difficult to access and participate in. However, while it might be easier to understand what the migrant men feel in terms of gender obligations within Chinese culture and our shared experiences of migration, for example, being away from our families, being a male researcher studying male migrants has advantages and disadvantages. But there are difficulties faced by all researchers in the field, irrespective of gender. For example, in initial meetings with (male) research participants, one needs to think through research techniques to make them feel at ease and develop mutual trust. However, in addressing issues of validity, gender relations were important in the process and a male researcher studying masculinity needs to be aware of the effect of one's gender identity throughout the process of the field work (Miles and Huberman, 1994). For example, at times as a Chinese man I could share their experience in terms of gender obligations, rules and values. However, one should not overstate this kind of male bonding and shared insider gender account between male researchers studying men. As Skeggs (2004) notes, being positioned within certain structural relations like gender and class does not necessarily give access to ways of knowing but it may help.

3.4:3 Data analysis

Reay (1996) raises the issue of the power of the researcher in the process of data analysis, which she sees as 'a complex and difficult intellectual process' (Reay, 1996:62), in terms of the selection of data and its relation to one's theoretical framework. This resonated with my own research project, in which I constantly

engaged with the tangled relation between empirical work and theory (Denzin, 1997; Maxwell, 2005; Silverman, 1993). As pointed out above, more positively, I viewed the empirical material and theory as a dialectical relationship, each informing the other as I developed my field work. I deployed discourse analysis in critically analyzing dominant public representations of male peasant workers circulating across the media, within governmental statements and other forms of public spaces, such as art, that I selected for the research (Fairclough, 1989). While examining shifting representations of Chinese male peasants within different historical eras, I particularly focused on current representations of these men using a gender lens. (see chapter 4). A primary purpose of collecting the male peasant workers' narratives was to make sense of their recognition, meanings, and understandings of their social positioning within urban spaces. The epistemological privileging of their accounts is methodologically significant because these men as gendered beings are 'invisible' in a range of literatures, including the literature on migration and gender (Pun 2005; Jacka 2005a; Yan, 2008) (See chapter 2). Alongside this, dominant representations and images of migrant men in public discourses across media, government and other public forms of narrative tend to remain de-gendered. In addressing the issue of validity within qualitative work, the multi-method approach of using discourse analysis, life histories and participant observation was productive in enabling me to cross-check data obtained from each of the methods (Maxwell, 2002). On reflection, I would have liked to have collected more quantitative material.

Immediately after conducting the interviews, I transcribed and translated them from Chinese to English for later analysis. However, when I listened to the interviews, I realized that some elements of their accounts were difficult to find an exact literal translation in English. However, as a native Chinese speaker, it was my responsibility to

translate them. I also realized that some of my translations might or might not capture the nature of what they ‘really meant’. In response, I translated as close a meaning as I could for some slang words they used and asked some of my colleagues and friends to verify my translations, while also relying on my experience, field notes and memory of the context to understand them in order to generate responsible knowledge (Temple, 1997; Song and Parker, 1995; Harraway, 1991).

The analysis began with transcribing interviews in a format that was readable for future reference. In order to maintain confidentiality, I set up research names for interviewees based on a combination of part of their names and their age. Interviews were analyzed in different categories according to the differences in age groups, content and themes. I first categorized the data into different age groups, seeing if I could find a pattern in each age group, by establishing similar conceptual statements in their interviews in terms of their narratives about their family lives and other social relations at their workplaces. I also categorized their narratives in terms of the contents of their experiences in relation to their families and work experiences, in order to establish potential general themes. For example, a general theme emerged in terms of their gender relations, as fathers, husbands/partners, and sons, within families and workplaces that they frequently referred to during the fieldwork. I then compared similarities and differences in the content of their narratives in order to pursue my data analysis. During the process of data analysis, I realized that the migrant men recalled experiences and decision-making at different stages of their lives, that often conflicted with what they regarded as common-sense understandings of their lives. In this situation, meanings actively were produced within the tension of emerging new understandings and old common-sense understandings at different stages of their lives. The contrasting understandings may have been informed by their current investment in

values associated with the modernization project, such as progress, which they were achieving through the process of rural-urban labour migration, alongside the traditional values in which they were culturally embedded.

In this process, modernity did not displace tradition. Rather, a more complex phenomenon occurred in which the latter became a major resource for a re-working of the former in the making of their social and gendered urban identities. Therefore, I tended to find a collective pattern within individual case studies, illustrating the process of how they made their self-identities within the context of the continuities and changes in gendered social relations during their movement from rural to urban settings (Jacka, 2005a, 2005b). I selected themes associated with the family that are considered in Chapter 5, and themes associated with their workplaces that are considered in Chapter 6. More specifically, within the two chapters, I selected material from the life histories and participant observation to illustrate the interconnecting gender and class processes in the making of Chinese male peasants' urban lives across family life and workplace locations.

3.4:4 Reflexivity

Bourdieu (2003) points to the importance of the researcher in the process of producing knowledge. He maintains that the choice of research topic, method and theory depends on what he calls the anthropological field, where the researcher or the national tradition, habits of thoughts, shared beliefs, rituals, values and rules are located (see Bourdieu, 2004). In the context of my field work, as a Chinese researcher influenced by both Chinese and western culture, my social, historical and political location and attendant subjectivity were of importance in producing responsible knowledge, as suggested by

Skeggs (1997). However, she (ibid.:18) notes that ‘we are positioned in but not determined by our location’. In terms of the position of the researcher operating within a post-positivist methodological tradition, Gray (2003:27-28) argues that:

‘as researchers, our own experience of everyday life and culture is regarded not as a hindrance or something which might sway or bias our research, but something which should be acknowledged and employed in our intellectual work.’

Therefore, in order to produce a responsible account of Chinese male peasant workers, my position, which is constituted by my academic knowledge and my cultural experience, is seen as an important resource in recognising and understanding the research participants’ accounts collected during my field work. Importantly, it is a resource to access working together within situated social contexts in critically examining dominant public representations and the existing knowledge of these men’s lives. It is such reflexivity that directs the design of the research. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) define reflexivity as

‘thinking about the conditions for what one is doing, investigating the way in which the theoretical, cultural and political context of individual and intellectual involvement affect interaction with whatever is being researched, often in ways difficult to become conscious of’ (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000:245).

Meanwhile, May (1998:15) maintains reflexivity is given ‘*with* rather than *upon* actions’. Reflexivity has been carried out throughout the design of the research, which involves critical intercommunication between the researcher’s academic knowledge and cultural experience, in terms of the choice of analytical frameworks and the empirical approach in the process of research.

3.4:5 Ethical issues

Ethical issues can be seen as a practice of reflexivity in carrying out empirical research. I argue that ethics is a concept that has culturally specific meanings. My research generally followed feminist research ethics (Skeggs, 2007), marked by reciprocity, honesty, accountability, responsibility and equality, while being aware of the difference of the cultural specificity of ethics in western and Chinese contexts. Foucault (1984:249 quoted by Barker, 2008) suggests the issues we need to ask before we accept or reject enlightenment rationality: ‘What is this reason that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and what are its dangers?’

A major ethical issue in social research is the need to consider how power relations operate between the researcher and participants within the process of carrying out empirical work. This project was carried out with the guidance of the University of Birmingham’s Code of Practice for Research⁶ and the Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association⁷, which stipulates how relations between researcher and research participants in the field should be organized:

‘Sociologists have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of research participants is not adversely affected by the research. They should strive to protect the rights of those they study, their interests, sensitivities and privacy, while recognising the difficulty of balancing potentially conflicting interest.

Because sociologists study the relatively powerless as well as those more powerful than themselves, research relationships are frequently characterised by disparities of power and status. Despite this, research relationships should be characterised, whenever possible, by trust and integrity...’ (Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association).

⁶ The University of Birmingham’s Code of Practice for Research http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Research.pdf

⁷ Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association at <http://www.britisoc.co.uk/equality/Statement+Ethical+Practice.htm> Last accessed June 22nd 2008

These guidelines were useful in providing a broad ethical framework, within which to carry out my empirical work. In the process of carrying out the research, all the participants were catered for under these guidelines. However, for many Chinese students studying in western universities such guidelines often appear overly bureaucratic, while at the same time not being built into the researcher-researched interaction as an integral element of the process. As the research was located within a Chinese context, it was important to be aware of the local, culturally defined ethical code in operation. Returning to the point I made earlier about ‘Guanxi’ (the Chinese style of social inter-personal relations), I asked my gatekeeper, who was my ‘Guanxi’ to the peasant workers in his factory, whether they would like to participate in my research project. Those who were introduced to me by my gatekeeper had already agreed to take part. They had been told about the purpose of the research before they met me and were asked to sign a consent form.

‘Guanxi’ is built on mutual trust and integrity which are central to the Chinese ethical code. There is a power relation operating between the researcher and the researched in this ‘guanxi’ network. Deploying Confucian ethical principles which invoke a concept of relationality, enabled me to attempt to minimize the effect of such power by building up trust during the process of the research. Hong (2004:57) usefully compares western and Confucian ethical principles in the following terms:

‘Within Confucian ethical principles, individual members’ rights are *contained* within their relational partners’ responsibilities. In contrast to Western conceptions of individual rights *versus* individual responsibilities, Confucian rights *and* responsibilities are inextricable packets. Individuals’ rights are ‘naturally’ realized not directly through an individual’s own actions, but indirectly through mutual loyalty to relationships and by faithfully satisfying responsibilities within relationships.’

Western universities continue to underplay a notion of difference in relation to how ethics are played out in different national contexts. This has significant ethical and practical effects that can serve as a barrier to carrying out empirical work in ‘non-western’ societies. For example, a key university requirement was that I gain consent from the peasant workers. However, in a Chinese context, and more specifically in relation to my research population, male peasant workers, the notion of consent that was experienced by them as ‘imposed consent’ had a very different meaning than that from a western perspective. For the men, in their everyday lives the signing of forms did not ensure their consent and potentially jeopardized the continuity of research as they did not understand the purpose or consequences of signing the form. Being ethical in the context of interviewing male peasant workers in China is about assuring them they are not involved in any ‘official’ investigation but rather with conversations based on trust and integrity. Establishing such relations are built upon making contacts, good interpersonal interaction between the researcher and the researched and ensuring a friendly interview environment. Such an approach is more anthropological than sociological. For example, I talked with some peasant workers on the street, sitting by the road rather than asking them to sit in a café or tea shop that I usually did with my friends, if this seemed appropriated to create a ‘safe environment’. Also, I had lunch with them in the factory workers’ canteen rather than asking them to sit in the factory office. In this situation, the interview setting was very informal and was ‘their own space’. These arrangements were developed as I tried to set up a friendly interview environment by integrating myself into their lives without causing them any trouble or ambiguity about my role.

The process of carrying out the research acted as an ethical apprenticeship in how to interact with men, with whom I had little previous experience. For example, when I was

carrying out interviews in a chemical factory, one of the participants was very uncomfortable when he started talking to me. When I asked him why, he said he was very embarrassed to talk to me when he was sweaty in a dirty uniform with a strong chemical smell from his clothes. At an early stage of the research I had little awareness of how these men viewed the interpersonal relations that were taking place while I interviewed them. I learned that they had a specific sense of themselves in relation to the people they talked to, including me, as a researcher, or other people in authority. Being in the field appeared to be highly productive in enabling me to develop an increasing awareness of the cultural specificity of interviewing as a form of interpersonal communication between interviewer and interviewee. This is an interesting example of an inversion of the assumed power relations (that methodological textbooks warned I should be aware of) operating between the 'educated' researcher and 'non-educated' peasant workers. The latter became my teachers in how to conduct empirical work in highly complex personal and social interactional terms. During my fieldwork, I tried to dress appropriately in order not to place pressure on my participants and observed their reaction in the process to make them feel comfortable, which I learned is an important ethical consideration in carrying out fieldwork face-to-face interviews. I also learned to try different approaches to minimize the social gap and the differences between myself and the participants by creating a friendly environment for our conversations. However, a sense of difference still existed between the participants and myself. For example, I still stood out in a crowd of male peasant workers even though I dressed appropriately and tried to fit into their lives.

My understanding of research ethical codes and my personal experience in the field enabled me to develop strategies in carrying out the interviews. Practices such as

building up mutual trust worthy relationships with the interviewees highlighted the ethical complexity of a western notion of informed consent (Knight et al., 2004; Marzano, 2007) in the research. The issue of ethics was considered and put into practice during every stage of the fieldwork as a key element of my reflexive thinking as a researcher.

3.5 Conclusion

The chapter has provided an examination and justification for the chosen methodological approach and the adoption of the research methods. I began with arguing for the need to *make* rather than *take* the research question, while acknowledging the autonomy of methodology. I demonstrated the importance of shifting to an interpretivist position that enabled me to capture the complex meanings that the migrant men attached to relocation from their rural villages to living and working in the city. The chapter emphasised the dynamic interplay between methodology, theory and data collection in examining this relocation. This was followed by a detailed exploration of the research design, data collection and how the research was carried out. The chapter explains how reflexivity around my own position within the field was of central significance and the complexity of implementing western ethics in a Chinese society as part of a broader issue of deploying western concepts in ‘non-western’ contexts. The following three chapters building on the first three chapters illustrate the application of the chosen methods of: life histories, ethnography and discourse analysis in developing a sustained and systematic analysis.

Section II

Data Analysis

Chapter Four

Public Narratives of Male Peasant Workers

4.1 The Public Gaze and the Cultural Production of Migrating Masculinities

4.2 Peasant, Worker and the Historical Formation of (Male) Peasant Worker

4.2:1 Gendering from ‘old times’ to ‘new times’

4.2:1-1 *Mao’s privileged peasant and worker*

4.2:1-2 *‘Peasant worker’ as the post-Mao ‘hero’*

4.2:1-3 *Peasant workers as low ‘suzhi’ migrant ‘men’*

4.2:2 Peasant workers as problematic gendered others

4.2:2-1 *Male peasant workers: violence and criminality*

4.2:2-2 *Male peasant workers: the ‘sexual’ myth*

4.3 Living with Difference

4.3:1 ‘Us’ and ‘them’: urban residents and (male) peasant workers

4.3:2 Maintaining ‘urban’ space and distance from (male) peasant workers

4.3:3 Urban residents, peasant workers and local language

4.4 Conclusion

4.1 The Public Gaze and the Cultural Production of Migrating Masculinities

If someone asked me about my first acquaintance with peasant workers, I would recall a memory from mid or late 1980s when I was still a child. I remember at that time, whenever I was naughty or did not listen to what my parents said, they and other adults in my family used to frighten me by threatening to send me to the ‘Jiangxi Monkeys’. Later, I understood that this referred to male peasant workers from outside Guangdong, (the province where I lived), who were looking ‘to make their fortune’ in southern cities of the country. They were publicly represented through very negative images including abducting city children. The meanings of peasant workers or ‘nong-min gong’ had no positive images in my early memory. Such negative images have a specific cultural history in relation to locally produced meanings. For Hall (1997:5) ‘meaning is thought to be produced—constructed—rather than simply “found”’. These images emerged at the same time as the rapid development of China during the economic reform period which produced a wide range of social and cultural changes. As Wacquant (1987:77) suggests ‘any social hierarchy must have a material grounding’. During the last two decades, labour migration has become a significant feature of population mobility in contemporary China accompanying post-Mao neoliberal economic modernization. It is important to develop a critical investigation about how this economic phenomenon and contemporary meanings of the peasant worker have been produced culturally and historically at a macro-level, in order to gain a more comprehensive and critical understanding of their current social and economic status. As I outlined in Chapter One, the discourse of post-Mao neoliberal modernization and rural/urban divisions has strengthened the ideological formation of the dichotomy of the ‘urban and rural’, which have gained new meanings in relation to the

associated concepts of the 'modern' and 'tradition'. Such a geographical dichotomy is also accompanied by unequal power relations that are seen to have intensified since the introduction of the government's uneven regional development policy, as well as imaginary differences of space existing among urban residents and migrant men. What is significant is the explanation of such geographic differences as a result of neoliberal economic modernization, in helping to construct Chinese male peasant workers' migrating masculinities through the representation of them in their move from the rural villages to cities.

The chapter has three inter-connected themes. First, it critically examines the brief genealogy of peasant worker as a term that has not a long history in Chinese social and political narratives. It is a concept that was generated with the emergence of Chinese neo-liberal modernization and the combination of two prestige classes from the Mao period - peasant and worker. The major public narratives of peasant workers are that of a group of socially and politically 'marginalized' people (see chapter 2) since post-Mao economic reform. This chapter aims to examine the hegemonic ideology of modernization operating within contemporary China, and its role in the construction of the current representation of male peasant workers. Hall (1996b) understands ideology as:

'the mental frame-works -- the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation -- which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works.' (Hall, 1996b:26)

The chapter traces the representations of Chinese (male) peasant workers in different discursive contexts, consisting of shifting, contradictory images including: hero, role model, criminal, sex offender and marginalized national urban resident. A comparative historical

discursive approach deployed within this chapter highlights the current ideological transformation of Chinese society.

Second, the chapter also aims to explore the cultural transformation of the material conditions since the 1970s in the formation of (male) peasant workers through the lens of gender. It critically examines public representations of peasant workers through governmental texts, the media and other forms of public narrative. Such representations are of importance in critically contextualizing rural-urban migrating masculinities.

Third, given the transformations in public narratives, dominant representations of (male) peasant workers discursively shape the general population's understanding of migrant men in 'new times'. In response, the chapter addresses urban residents' perspectives of the male peasant workers, as part of the dominant public understanding of these men, that serves to contribute to a broader understanding of their social stratification. The latter includes their social position in terms of what the peasant workers are perceived to lack within the dominant discourse of post-Mao modernization.

4.2 Peasants, Workers and the Historical Formation of (Male) Peasant Workers

An historical analysis enables us to see that representations of peasant workers are connected to rapid social change in China. More specifically, this section explores the changing images of 'peasant' and 'worker' to 'peasant worker'. At present, peasant workers and associated social issues such as household registration, health care and social insurance are centrally linked to the economic reform and transition of 'modernization with

Chinese characteristics', alongside Deng Xiaoping's aphorism: 'to get rich'¹ since late 1970s and early 1980s (see Chapter One). Peasant workers have become a top priority on policy makers' agendas due to a series of social inequality issues associated with their migration to the city, which are also projected as the failure of pre-reform economic development, highlighted by rural poverty. Such awareness has resulted in specific public representations of peasant workers being generated through government reports, the media and art work.

However, 'peasant worker' is a relatively new concept developed in late 1970s. Of importance, during the past few decades, representations and images of both peasants and workers in China have been an important basis for understanding the historical significance of the formation of the contemporary 'peasant worker'. 'Peasant' and 'worker' have been transformed *from* role models, which were highly positively projected in the Maoist period, when young people from towns were sent to be re-educated by peasants in rural areas, *to* current images of them as unprivileged residents. They have come to represent a sense of 'otherness' in the city, due to their economic and social status, as marginalized urban dwellers, even though the government acknowledges their central contribution to the modernization project and attempts to enhance their political status and representation.

¹ To get rich is the ultimate aim of Chinese modernization, moving away from poverty under the old socialist economy, see Chan and Senser (1997)

4.2:1 Gendering from ‘old times’ to ‘new times’

The first question I need to address is the concept of peasant worker. The role of the state is of particular importance in the historical formation of the identity of (male) peasant workers. Peasant, in Chinese, *nongmin* (农民), literally means resident in the agricultural sector, based on Chinese characters: ‘农’ [nong], which refers to agricultural and rural; while ‘民’ [min] refers to people. Traditionally, China was an agricultural society and people’s lives depended on what they grew to enable self-sufficiency for their families. Peasants continue to constitute the major segment of population in China², even now, within the rural-urban household system. The transformation to post-Mao modernization has also resulted in the terms peasant and worker being retranslated as peasant workers, with accompanying connotations shifting from privileged class groups to urban ‘others’.

4.2:1-1 Mao’s privileged peasants and workers

During the civil war before the new People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949, peasants were a major military force for the Communist party to fight for the new China. The Communist party won the war with the support of peasants and other urban proletarian classes defined by the communist party, such as urban industrial workers, who also became a key element of the national constitution of new China in ideologically and politically securing the party’s ruling power. For example, such a privileged political position can be found on the Chinese national flag, ‘Five Stars Red Flag’, on which the big star represents

² China has a population of nearly 1.3 billion people, within which 36.09% are urban residents and 63.91% are rural residents, according to the fifth national survey in 2000. Resource: http://www.stats.gov.cn/TJGB/RKPCGB/qgrkpcgb/t20020331_15434.htm

the Chinese Communist Party, and the four small stars represent four major social classes within China: workers, peasants, national bourgeoisie and national capitalists. The peasants' and workers' political and social status, alongside the other two classes, are still represented in national political discourse. Fifty years ago during the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government set up a programme of 'Shang Shan Xia Xiang' (Go up to mountain and go down to village), during 1967-1978 in which 17 million urban youth were sent to live and work with and to be 're-educated' by the peasants in rural areas (Bernstein, 1977; Zhou and Hou, 1999). Highly positive images of peasants were projected at that time, indicating that they were a privileged social class in China. They were represented as the state's master, who would teach and lead the whole nation to common prosperity (Chen, 2002). Such campaigns were promoted to encourage urban youth to join the peasants with such slogans as 'Go Among the Workers, Peasants and Soldiers', 'Workers, Peasants and Soldiers are the essential power of revolutionary success' (see picture A below).



Picture A³



Picture B⁴

³ Source: <http://www.108520.cn/html/wengehaibao-zhaotie/gongren/20080302/5424.html>

⁴ Source: <http://zggr.cn/?action-viewnews-itemid-497>

Within Picture A, the peasant on the left is represented by a tough middle-aged rural man. In this image, he rolls up his sleeves to show his strong arms. He is smiling, looking far ahead, representing positive images that would lead to the bright future of new China. While at the same time, it is difficult to tell whether the urban youth on the right is male or female but s/he also rolls up his/her sleeves illustrating physical well being for the future of a socialist new China through participating in labour activities with the peasants. This is particularly salient in understanding gender issues in terms of masculinity and femininity in the early Maoist period, in terms of the 'gender erasure' of women marked by 'class struggle' and 'masculinisation' (Brownell and Wassertrom, 2002) within which 'women were pressured to dress and act like men, but not vice versa' (Brownell and Wassertrom, 2002:251). It was seen as 'progress' to act like a man, while to act like a woman was labelled as regression (Honig, 2002). Such representations emphasize the privileged social and political status of peasants. At the same time, images of peasants as physically strong and masculine became a model for urban youth to adopt. Similarly, in the cities, people at that time felt very proud to be a worker in the factory. Similar to Picture A, Picture B represents the privileged status of workers in the Maoist period, in which workers were depicted as masters of the country, represented mainly by a group of masculine-like workers. During that period before the late 1970s, if you had a family member working in a factory, that meant your whole family would be entitled to social security and welfare benefits, as well as high social status recognized within the whole society. My parents informed me that at that time, people tended to pass on their factory jobs to their children as they were secure with the entitlement of state benefits.

Since the late 1970s, peasants started to leave their home to work in non-agricultural sectors⁵ following Deng Xiaoping's new economic policy of modernization and development in light of his political slogan 'to get rich', alongside the reality of rural poverty. However, due to the dual social structure set up by the Household Registration System (*Hukou*)⁶ (see Chapter Two), their original agricultural *hokou* became an obstacle in the process of moving from rural villages to cities. Within the context of this particular institutional barrier, the notion of peasant worker emerged as a new social category or social class that was associated with urban marginalization. From a historical perspective, peasants' and workers' social status has been falling since the introduction of economic reform. Such changes of meanings and connotations were accompanied by a government discourse of a post-Mao modernization project, in which the idea of 'getting rich' and the neoliberal market economy now dominated the whole nation. Prior (1997:70) argues that 'a representation should be understood not as a true and accurate reflection of some aspect of an external world, but as something to be explained and accounted for through the discursive rules and themes that predominate in a particular socio-historical context.' Ideas of modernization, development and getting rich have become the new hegemonic ideology operating within people's lives within the current historical context, which guide people's thinking and seeing and importantly, the production of knowledge of the peasant worker.

⁵ Or in Li's (2004a) notion, the 'informal sector' in the city.

⁶ Due to social and economic reforms in China, the restriction of mobility between rural and urban areas has become less tight. However, problems associated with *Hukou*, for example, such as housing, education and other social welfare issues still exist. See Mao, L. (2003).

4.2:1-2 'Peasant worker' as the Post-Mao 'hero'

Kam Louie (2002), in theorizing Chinese masculinities, suggests that “ideal masculinity can be either *wen* or *wu* but is at its height when both are present to a high degree” (2002:16) with *wen* associated with the cultural, intellectual, civil and non-physical, while *wu* is associated with the martial, military and physical. His (Louie, 2002) conceptualization of ‘*wu*’ as one of the characteristics of Chinese masculinities is well represented in images of peasants and workers in the Mao period, as I illustrated above. Such representations emphasizing images of the ‘hero’, continue to exist within contemporary political representations of Chinese (male) peasant workers. In such representations they are associated with the notion of ‘*wu*’. In 2006, the Chinese Council issued a report on ‘Some opinions on resolving the problems faced by peasant workers’⁷, which describes peasant workers as:

‘a new labour army working in the process of reform and opening-up industrialization, urbanization of our country.’ (my emphasis)

Meanwhile, the Chinese State Council launched a report in 2006 entitled ‘Research Report on Chinese Migrant Workers’⁸, deploying superlative adjectives to describe peasant workers’ lives in direct contradiction to their images as an ‘army’ and ‘hero’:

‘Peasant workers, or migrant workers get the lowest salary, working in the heaviest, hardest, dirtiest, most tiring, most dangerous job; meanwhile, they are

⁷ Chinese State Council (2006a) *Some Opinions on Resolving the Problems Faced by Migrant Workers* (国务院关于解决农民工问题的若干意见), issued by the Chinese State Council on 31 Jan 2006, available at http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2006-03/27/content_237644.htm (accessed on 25-11-2006)

⁸ Chinese State Council (2006b) *Research Report on Chinese migrant workers* (Zhongguo Nonmingong Diaoyan Baogao 中国农民工调研报告). Beijing: Shiyan Publisher. In this report, it shows that male peasant workers comprise 66.3% of the total number of peasant workers.

wearing the **cheapest** clothes, using the **cheapest** goods, eating the **cheapest** food, living in the **cheapest** house.’ (Chinese State Council, 2006b) (my emphasis)

In responding to the government report, state news papers have produced similar narratives of peasant workers’ lives:

*‘Peasant worker is **an important resource of new industrial worker** of our country. It is **a necessary constructional power** in the process of urbanization. This group of people are still in mobility and change at present. Their lives are comparatively hard. Their rights are easily affected. The Party’s 17th congress report points out, it is necessary to develop basic democracy to insure people are entitled to more practical democratic rights...’* (*‘Let the peasant worker participate in the political life of the country’ Workers’ Daily 2007-11-25*)⁹

*“From 2003 to 2007, peasant workers’ salaries with a total amount of 43.32 billion yuan have been resolved, the situation of salary delay is under control. Deputy Minister of the Labour Ministry said, ‘solving the problems of peasant workers is a huge task of social management and public service in our country... There are also some main issues within the legal rights protection of peasant workers: **low** numbers of labour contracting, **bad** working environment, **long working hours, occupational diseases, work accidents, low salary, delayed salary, low number signing up for social insurance.**’”* (*Workers’ Daily, 27-12-2007*)¹⁰ (my emphasis)

In such narratives, peasant workers are portrayed as ‘a new labour army’, who contribute to the success of Chinese neoliberal modernization. The statement has a historical resonance that recalls peasants’ and workers’ important social political position in new China. Although there is no explicit gender reference regarding male peasant workers in current state narratives, however, the figure of the peasant worker still carries images of peasants and workers with strong ‘wu’ masculine connotations. However, such representations of peasant workers in terms of images of physical labouring are seen as not compatible with

⁹ Guo, B. (2007) Let the peasant worker participate in the political live of the country. *Workers’ Daily*. 2007-11-25.

¹⁰ Liu, Z. and Zhou, Y. (2007) The nation resolved peasant workers’ delayed salary 43.32 billion yuan. *Workers’ Daily*. 27-12-2007.

the national ideology of modernization or ‘getting rich’. Their masculine characteristic of ‘wu’ associated with physical labouring is marginalized and overshadowed by ‘money’, ‘knowledge’ and other forms of characteristics associated with ‘wen’ masculinity. Representations of peasant workers in relation to labour or ‘wu’ masculinity generally emphasize inferiority within the material conditions and hegemonic discourses of the post-Mao modernization period. As the above news commentary states: ‘their lives are comparatively hard. Their rights are easily affected.’ They are portrayed as the ‘labour army’ that serves Chinese modernization; while, at the same time, they are officially described as ‘unprivileged’ without specific legal rights to which their urban counterparts are entitled. Such references as ‘occupational diseases’, ‘low salary’ and ‘no social insurance’ illustrate their low status and subordination in the context of Chinese modernization. Most importantly, socioeconomically, they have been subordinated which is represented by ‘wearing the cheapest clothes, using the cheapest goods, eating the cheapest food, living in the cheapest house.’

In general, the above narratives emphasize a contradictory image of peasant workers in post-Mao society as both heroic and socially subordinated. A report in a leading state-owned newspaper, the *Workers’ Daily* illustrates that even when peasant workers are portrayed as role models in the media, the images remain problematic and controversial.

*‘Feng Huijun, a normal peasant worker, donated 63,800 ml blood in the past seven years without reward, which is equivalent to 10 times of the total volume of blood of a human body. His blood is running through countless bodies, **rescued many lives, and saved many happy families...**’ (Workers’ Daily, 22-12-2007)¹¹*
(my emphasis)

¹¹ Yin, X. (2007) Life, walking on the grateful road. *Workers’ Daily*. 22-12-2007.

The representation of the (male) peasant worker in this story may be read as the Chinese state attempting to construct a masculine 'heroic' image of peasant workers. However, what is paradoxical here is that the image of such a 'hero', who sacrifices his life for others, is not the privileged '*wu*' masculinity representing peasants as progressive in the pre-reform period. Rather, located in current historical material conditions, such representations reinforce their 'otherness' in contemporary China because they cannot demonstrate their modern identity by donating money or other material based goods but only their blood. In this case, the peasant worker is a signifier of the poor, which does not match the materialist-oriented society in transitional Chinese society. His masculine 'heroic' behaviour is not based on his economic ability but on his body. This story suggests the old dominant ideology of the peasant as hero and role model been reconstituted to symbolize a new mode of masculinity with contradictory meanings. Their masculinity is not self-evidently recognized in contemporary China but discursively constructed by the continuity of the state ideology. However, the more the government emphasizes peasant workers' 'heroic' images, the more they reinforce the image of men outside the current national 'modern' ideology of 'getting rich', progress, and development. In short, within the mainstream dominant discourse of modernization their marginalized social status has been generated and reinforced in terms of what they are 'not'. Disseminated through state documents and media images, the men's 'heroic' '*wu*' masculinity is marginalized within the discourse of Chinese post-Mao modernization. In the following sections I further illustrate such marginalization and subordination of these men within public fora.

4.2:1-3 Peasant workers as low 'suzhi' migrant 'men'

Within post-Mao modernization, peasant workers' subordinated status is also due to their low 'suzhi', represented by their low level of educational qualifications. The images of peasant workers are associated with a form of labour that lacks knowledge and skills that are seen as essential in modern society. Such representations are projected within different forms of public narratives, which resonate with Chinese people's reference to peasant workers as a group of people without 'culture', with strong connotations of 'tradition' and 'backwardness'. (In Chinese, 'culture' means educated, civilized and intellectual). The following report illustrates how their 'no culture' image affects their working lives as male peasant workers.

*'The security department of Songzao Mining Group proposes **redundancy** for a peasant worker, Zhou, as a group leader...Zhou was selected as the workshop leader of a mining team two months ago, when **he** had been working for only six months. Colleagues think he is down to earth, doesn't mind eating bitter (hard working) and is willing to help people...But the security department says they cannot recruit a new peasant worker as the leader of the mining group for security reasons that they **do not have sufficient ability to lead the mining group and ask them to select a new leader for the workshop**. This decision was opposed by his colleagues, seeing it as discrimination towards peasant workers.'* (Workers' Daily 2007-11-01)¹² (my emphasis)

Peasant worker in this case is associated with a range of collective characteristics. Here, we see how these ascribed (male) characteristics are valued by different social groups. To his colleagues, Zhou's characteristics are the basis of trust that they have in him to choose him as their representative. However, from the Security Department's perspective, these characteristics are interpreted in a negative way as illustrating Zhou's lack of 'modern'

¹² Gong, G. (2007) Why can't the new recruited peasant worker be promoted? *Workers' Daily*. 2007-11-01.

qualifications to take up a leadership role. At a broader level, a major issue is the lack of 'positive images' of peasant workers as a key social group in the modernization project. In terms of academic representations, even in gender studies and literature on Chinese internal migration that critique mainstream studies, a positive profile of male peasant workers tends to be absent in these fields of inquiry. However, male images constantly appear in political representations in Chinese government reports and state-owned media. The discursive shift to modernization does not fundamentally change the government's representations of 'peasant' and 'worker', in attempting to politically articulate a positive identity for (male) peasant workers, as significant players in the process of Chinese industrialization and modernization. However, these representations consist of contradictory elements as both the state portrayed labour army and a marginalized population. This contradiction within political discourses of (male) peasant workers is the result of the national dominant discourse of the Chinese path to modernization and urbanization and the simultaneous unbreakable connection to the communist spirit and ideology. Other spectacles of (male) peasant workers are available in the media that culturally formulate a more complex representation of male peasant workers in the current transitional modern Chinese society to which I will return in the next section.

Meanwhile, representations of gendered peasant workers in contemporary art and new media technology in 'new times' resonate with dominant government and media discourses narrating the men's low '*suzhi*' as well as their status of 'otherness'. On the one hand, within the current discourse of modernization, the rural/urban dualism has provided an institutional language to conceptualize contemporary China and empower the urban to gaze on 'the rural', highlighting the latter's economic marginality in the government discourse

of modernization and development. On the other hand, politically, such differences are read as serving to advocate the advantages of a current post-Mao neoliberal modernization project, while condemning the Maoist failure of rural-based development (Yan, 2003, 2008). Within such different narratives, the meanings of men and masculinity change in relation to the changing meanings of rural and urban in different historical periods. Compared to the images of the peasant (Picture A) and the worker (Picture B) in the post-reform period, contemporary art, such as Picture C, highlights the marginality of this group of migrant men. The central image in this picture is a group of male peasant workers having lunch at a building site. They are not properly dressed, skinny, eating plain and simple dishes, which illustrate their difficult living conditions. The expressions in their eyes indicate that they are very tired and have a sense of hopelessness, with a connotation of low *suzhi* compared to the bright and masculine images of peasants and workers in Pictures A and B. What is shocking is the sign of danger in the background, indicating their living and working conditions. In this painting, their marginality is visibly represented compared to Picture A, in which the male peasants' privileged social and political status is visibly represented. Picture D captures a male peasant worker overlooking the buildings in the city at a far distance, indicating their exclusion from urban life even though they are a major contributor to the urbanization project.



Picture C¹³



Picture D¹⁴

¹³ Picture B is painted by Li Ping, a contemporary artist who specializes in painting peasant workers and representing their tough life working in the city. 'Peasant workers at tea' by Li Ping (2008), Source: <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/sd/2009-04-01/091117526032.shtml>

¹⁴ By Wu Zhong Lin, Source: http://news.xinhuanet.com/local/2007-04/11/content_5962047.htm (accessed on 12-01-09)

Current representations of male peasant workers are pervasive across China, associating them with being dirty, involved in hard work, uncivilized and backward. The figure of the peasant worker in the media is assumed to be male, if not specifically referred to as female. This is compatible with government reports on peasant workers which concentrate on males. Such public narratives are of central importance in helping to formulate more complex images constituting people's understanding of (male) peasant workers. They help to create the 'otherness' of male peasant workers, for example, when people read about them on media platforms, such as newspapers. Peasant workers' masculinities are also constituted through such negative representations. Hall (1997:259) argues that power is understood 'not only in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion, but also in broader cultural or symbolic terms, including the power to represent someone or something in a certain way - within a certain "regime of representation"'. What I mean by 'negativity' is the way the media deploy a range of dichotomies such as rural/urban and modern/tradition within dominant public narratives, which *emphasizes difference between* peasant workers and established urban dwellers. At the same time, such representations are of importance in stereotyping male peasant workers. This will be illustrated in the following sections.

4.2:2 Peasant workers as problematic gendered others

As I indicated above, peasants and workers as well as peasant workers have been gendered as urban 'others' within post-Mao modernization discourse. Although the government continues to provide positive, albeit contradictory, images of male peasant workers, across popular culture and among established urban residents the major representation is

extremely negative. These images inform the government's development policy with its concern of taking care of these marginalized people to enable them to overcome their ascribed characteristics of potential criminality, violence and sexual repression. In so doing, the government claims that male peasant workers will be able to benefit from the opportunities opened up by the modernization project.

4.2:2-1 Male peasant workers: violence and criminality

Currently, male peasant workers are frequently projected as a group of people with irrational behaviour that serves to suggest their lifestyles are not conducive to a modern urban society. One of South China's main newspapers reported on new peasant workers in terms of 'The worry of the criminals of the new generation of peasant workers':

*'Zhu, born in 1984, often surfs pornography web sites. One day, he suddenly got an idea to imitate what he learnt from the internet. He **raped a six year old girl** when he visited his relatives... Xiaoliang, and another 11 mates **stole cars and motorbikes** during the period of December 2004 and June 2005...(editor comments on it:). No money, no work, which does not necessarily lead to criminal behaviour. There is a 'city dream' behind the phenomenon. The gap between the rural and the urban results in the increase of the desire for material goods for the new migrants...' (Yangcheng Evening, 16-04-08)¹⁵ (my emphasis)*

This report is an example of a wide range of representations of male peasant workers that carry solid tabloid effects in sensationalizing negative images of them. Migrant men are defined by association with criminal behaviour, such as that of thieves, rapists and paedophiles. Such media commentary also often emphasizes urban residents' fears towards

¹⁵ Feng, X. (2008) Her dream is to become a famous prostitute: criminal situation of new generation of peasant workers worries people. *Yangcheng Evening*. 16-04-08.

male peasant workers' projected criminal behaviour. While one report represents these men through their criminal behaviour, another report focuses on their inability to challenge institutional discrimination, for example, their action towards unjustified treatment at work.

*'On 22nd of July, a leader with thirteen peasant workers in Wuhan had a **fight** with the employer when they were tracing back their salary of more than a hundred thousand Yuan. Five of them were beaten by the security staff, the other nice peasant workers claimed they **would jump from the top of the building if they could not get the money back**'. (NetEase, 2008-07-23) (my emphasis)*

Such representations of male peasant workers indicate not only their assumed violence, but also how urban-based commentators construct them as stubborn, suggesting images of low *suzhi*. For example, rather than using legal channels to claim money owed to them, they threaten to commit suicide if they are not paid. On the one hand, they are represented as using illegitimate, irrational (masculine) primitive strength to gain their rights. On the other hand, it reinforces the image of their relative powerlessness within the discourse of urban modernization. Such different representations of these men within a single report illustrate the complex relations between male peasant workers and urban institutions.

4.2:2-2 Male peasant workers: the 'sexual' myth

Among the range of negative representations of peasant workers, their health and sexual practices are another major issue in public narratives that contribute to their projected otherness. Public narratives classify them as a group of men who are unhealthy and sexually repressed. With the increasing media visibility of peasant workers, they have become a popular topic for discussion across society. The difference between the representation of male peasant workers and female peasant workers (Dagong mei) is

emphasized on the net. For example, if you search ‘打工妹 Dagong mei’ (female peasant workers) on *any online search engine*, most of the results are about the vulnerability of ‘Dagong mei’ in the city, where they may have been robbed or raped, their difficult experiences of working in the city, their unfair treatment in the city and more significantly, their experience of ‘er nai’¹⁶ in southern urban cities. However, if you input ‘male peasant worker’, in Chinese (男性民工), into ‘Google’ and search, the top 10 results are stories and reports that cover the problems of the male peasant workers’ sex lives. They have been caricatured as a group of men that are suffering sexual repression, with an assumption that their sexuality cannot be expressed without a satisfactory sex life due to their status of being alone in the city without the company of a wife/partner. The term of ‘male peasant worker’ has become a popular signifier that has major connotations in relation to prostitution and sexual diseases.

*‘The 28th of October is the Fourth ‘Male Health Day’. The theme of this year is ‘Male Health, Scientific Knowledge’... The sex life of married and mature peasant workers cannot be fulfilled and some of them are suffering **sexual repression**. Psychological problems are present among these sexually repressed peasant workers for a long time, and causing a series of social issues.’ (Xinhua Net¹⁷, 07-11-2003) (my emphasis)*

*‘...Their (peasant workers) **mobility, loneliness, sexual morality, knowledge and the status as visitors** make them easier to be infected and spread HIV/AIDS’, according to Jing Jun, director of the HIV/AIDS policy research centre, Tsinghua University. ...(He adds) Frequently mobility results in unsettled residency. According to a survey carried out by the Central China Medical University living places of fluid population are mainly in rented apartments (50%) and collective dormitories (33%), in addition to long distance emotional relations and*

¹⁶ ‘Er nai’ is a term to refer to a ‘second wife’ or a woman in an unlawful affair with a man who is still married. (Lang and Smart, 2002)

¹⁷ http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2003-11/07/content_1165759.htm

*insufficient income, it is inevitable that some people become the victims of some **indecent behaviours** (prostitution), which makes them **easier** to be in a situation that is **infected by and distribute HIV/AIDS**...Peasant workers' **attitude to sex is relatively open**, 1/3 of them expressed they have no problem having sex before marriage, **especially to those unmarried male peasant workers**...Their educational level is relatively low. The lack of education results in their lack of knowledge of sexual health. That is why they have become the focused group of HIV/AIDS prevention.' (Workers' Daily, 2007-12-1 'Why peasant workers become the focus group to prevent/diagnose of HIV/AIDS?')¹⁸ (my emphasis)*

*'A survey of peasant workers' sexual health in Guangzhou reveals that 10% of **unmarried male peasant workers** have **multiple sexual partners**, 1/4 of whom do not use condoms. Some people name them as the '**origin of disease**'. (Yangcheng Evening, 2007-03-14)¹⁹ (my emphasis)*

This is a new media-based gender stereotype of male peasant workers created within contemporary China which constantly appears in public fora, that was identified by male peasant workers as a major negative issue for them in living in the city. Barthes (1972) argues that repetition and familiarity legitimize the organization of signifiers in a culture, which become naturalized and valued in what he calls a mythology, which 'does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but of a statement of fact' (Barthes, 2009:269). The dominant media representations that constantly appear in people's daily lives discursively constructs the myth of 'sexually dangerous' male peasant workers. This reflects the unequal power relations within contemporary Chinese society, in which the knowledge of (male) peasant workers has been produced and maintained by urban commentators through elite officials'

¹⁸ Che, H. (2007) Why peasant workers become the focus group to prevent/diagnose of HIV/AIDS? *Workers' Daily*. 01-12-2007.

¹⁹ Feng, X.; Lu, Y. Xia, Y. (2007) Representatives urge concern about marriage and family issues of peasant workers. *Yangcheng Evening*. 2007-03-14.

narratives and representations. Importantly, within the context of the cultural politics of the modernization project, it serves to define the dichotomous notions of the ‘urban’ and the ‘rural’, with the former projected as modern and civilized and the latter as backward and inferior. Hall (1997:49) notes that knowledge linked to power can produce a truth. The myth of male peasant workers’ sexual health reflects such power relations between them and their urban counterparts. This includes the fact that there are few institutional public spaces to challenge dominant media images. For example, one of my interviewees responded to the media representation of male peasant workers’ sex lives in the following way:

Liu Xiong (35 years old, tricycle rider): It seems that only Dagong zai (male peasant workers) have sex life problems. There must be some people looking for sex with ‘Miss’ (prostitute). But it is not all of us... I work very hard during the day. I am too tired to look for ‘Miss’... There must be more city men looking for ‘Miss’. They have money. I don’t have money to look for ‘Miss’.

In Chapter Five and Chapter Six I provide evidence from the male peasant workers’ narratives of their creative responses to the negative material conditions that helped shape their dislocation and marginalization within the city. In contrast, there was little evidence of the working class men feeling that they could counter the elite representations that were highly pervasive across the post-Mao society. Within the national project of modernization and development, peasant workers are ideologically projected as modernization losers. Larrain notes that ‘...a negative concept of ideology which pretends to know which are the contradictions in society and how they can be truly solved, shares with other “meta-narratives” a totalitarian character: they are not only over-simplifications but also “terroristic” in that they legitimate the suppression of difference’ (Lyotard, 1984, cited by Larrain, 1996:63). A lack of social and cultural capital prevented the migrant men from

establishing their own media material to challenge the ascribed characteristics of potential criminality, violence and sexual repression.

4.3 Living with Difference

Within the dominant discourse of modernization and development, rural men are generally categorized as urban ‘others’, marked by backwardness, lack of education, and dangerous (physically as well as sexually). In other words, they are ideologically positioned as outside the post-Mao modernization project. A pervasive image of them as uncivilized circulates among established urban residents. During my fieldwork in China in 2007, I interviewed urban citizens, seeking to understand how dominant stereotypes and representations of the men were played out in their interactions with peasant workers.

4.3:1 ‘Us’ and ‘them’: urban residents and (male) peasant workers

As illustrated above, media representations of male peasant workers tended to be extremely negative. Urban residents’ understanding and common-sense conceptions of male peasant workers were mainly shaped by media and political representations of the men. In turn, the residents added another layer of negative stereotyping of the working class migrants that circulates across Chinese society.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about your impression of peasant workers?

*Yao Yu (27 years old, Female, Civil Servant): er... **Not very good looking (bushi hen hao kan), dirty (zang), impolite (mei li mao), no culture (mei wen hua).** (my emphasis)*

Interviewer: Why do you have such an impression?

Yao Yu: They work on construction sites...

Interviewer: Do you make any distinction between male peasant workers and female peasant workers?

Yao Yu: It seems to me that it is unsuitable to call female peasant workers 'peasant workers'. People usually call them 'dagong mei' (working sister)... I believe 'peasant worker' refers to male.

Interviewer: Why?

*Yao Yu: 'Peasant worker' gives people an impression they do **heavy physical work**...So it is strange to call women 'peasant worker'. We call male peasant workers 'dagong zai' (working brother) sometimes. But 'dagongzai' does not necessarily mean peasant worker. But to me, 'peasant worker' refers to a man. (my emphasis)*

Yao Yu's understanding of peasant workers resonates with the state's reductionist notion of peasant workers as people carrying out heavy, dirty, physical work, which for Yao Yu exclusively defines them. In patriarchal societies such as China, such work is also associated with men rather than women. Therefore, conceptually peasant workers are associated with a range of work-based masculine connotations. Furthermore, the masculinization of peasant workers is reinforced within government discourses, in which they are projected in a more positive way, as a (male) labour army central to the success of the modernization project.

4.3:2 Maintaining 'urban' space and distance from (male) peasant workers

Integration of peasant workers into the city is a central social and political issue for the Chinese government (see Chapter Two, section 2.2:2). There is a social hierarchy operating within urban spaces, generated within the current discourse of modernization. Due to their

low skilled jobs, the peasant workers are located at the base of the hierarchy; while at the same time been excluded from other social spaces in which urban modern values are constituted.

*Wang Ling (49 years old, female, school teacher): They (male peasant workers) are poor, carrying down rubbish everyday in summer like this...very hot... I do feel sorry for them...Some of them are **very rude**...They have **no culture** (uneducated). The other day, a **waisheng zai** (外省仔, literally refers to men from another province; male peasant workers) pressed the door bell down stairs and said “open the door, rubbish!” in a very bad manner. I am afraid of them, they have very **bad manners**, like I owe them money... You can’t shout at them, in case they break in when we are away... Some of them are very **jealous** of rich people in the city, (I think that is why) they are very **rude** to us. I always tell my family to keep the door locked in case they (male peasant workers) come to steal something. (my emphasis)*

*Ying Qi (40 years old, female, housewife): There are many **waishengzai** (male peasant workers from other provinces) on the street, but I never talk to them. (my emphasis)*

Interviewer: Why?

*Ying Qi: Errrr (she shows me a face) They **don’t speak our language**... One day, I asked a **waishengzai** (male migrant worker) to take me to Small Park (a place in the city), I didn’t know how to say it in Mandarin, he didn’t understand me and I didn’t understand him... He asked me to sit on the bike... I didn’t sit on it. They are **dangerous**, in case they took me to places I don’t know and I couldn’t jump out of his bike...I don’t want to **cause myself trouble** to talk to them in a different language... You don’t talk to strangers, do you? And they are peasant workers. (my emphasis)*

The words in bold are the description of male peasant workers made by an urban female resident; while, the words underlined are her reaction to male peasant workers. Based on residential and social spatial segregation between peasant workers and urban residents, as well as the media’s pervasive negative representations, established urban residents

imagined that male peasant workers were a potential threat to their lives. At the same time, some of the residents were sympathetic to media narratives that the male peasant workers' economic vulnerability had the potential to push them into criminality.

What interests me in such a narrative is urban residents' categorization of male peasant workers, with whom they have little interaction. Labelling them 'waisheng zai' is a way to distinguish 'them' from 'us' as outsiders. Such practices resonate with Skeggs' (2005) understanding of the living out of class relations, that 'the middle class comes to "know" its inner city other through an imposed system of infinitely repeatable substitutions and proxies: census tracts, crime statistics, tabloid newspapers and television programmes' (Skeggs, 2005: 65). While at the same time, Reay (2007:1192) adds that 'they also come to "know" the working classes through "place-images"' – dangerous 'no-go' areas inhabited by peasant workers. In the narratives, the men are described in terms of being 'rude', having 'no culture', being 'dangerous', 'causing trouble', corresponding with the media narratives of (male) peasant workers that I illustrated above. Such articulation of 'insider/outsider' relations resonates with Finch's (1993:144) understanding of the origin of the concept of working class. She maintains that the concept had no meaning outside middle class' consciousness with an accompanying discourse providing language, knowledge and power for naming the category of working class. Meanwhile, Ying Qi does not want to try to explain to the peasant worker where she would like to go because they do not speak the same dialect. There are some cultural differences, such as language, that exist between the peasant workers and the urban residents in the Guangdong province. Such language boundaries carry important symbolic capital, resulting in unequal power relations

between rural and urban people, especially between people from outside the province and local people.

4.3:3 Urban residents, peasant workers and local language

South China, especially the Guangdong province has become the national pioneer of modernization as a prioritized area of government economic development. This means Guangdong is the centre of capital flows and an important destination for rural migrants to ‘get rich’. In the past 20 years, Guangdong has attracted more than 19 million peasant workers²⁰ from other inner provinces, comprising one third of the total population of peasant workers in the whole country. Most of them speak different dialects to people in Guangdong.

*Yu Ke (20 years old, female, university student): I haven’t heard the term male peasant worker, but I know they are called **waisheng zai** (literally means young men from outside the province) here... (my emphasis)*

Interviewer: Could you tell me your impression of waishengzai?

*Yu Ke: ...En... they are poor, doing Kuli (hard manual work), very rude... The other day, I saw a group of male peasant workers having a fight on the road, I don’t know why. I guess they were fighting for a customer for their service (tricycle rider). They were very **noisy**, like **Po Fu** (泼妇: like a shrew shouting abuse in the street). (my emphasis)*

Interviewer: Why were they like Po Fu?

Yu Ke: It sounds like that. I couldn’t understand (their language) what they were shouting about... very noisy.

²⁰ Guangdong is the biggest province in China with more than 26.2 million peasant workers in the province, among which, 19 million are from outside Guangdong, according to the *Yangcheng Evening*, the leading newspaper in the Guangdong province. (Yangcheng Evening, 01-15-2008)

Interviewer: Have you ever talked to them?

Yu Ke: Never. We have a male zhongdian worker (hourly paid house cleaner) to clean our home every week, I never talk to him. When he needs to work in my room, I move to the other room...(But) sometimes my mum asks me to keep an eye on him occasionally in case he steals something from the house...My mum sometimes gives them some left-over food. She said they are poor that they cannot afford food. It is better giving the food to them than throwing it away. (my emphasis)

Besides the term *Waishengzai*, people in Guangdong also use specific local-based terms to refer to male peasant workers.

Sun Ying (26 years old, female, TV editor): We don't call them male peasant workers. We call them 'Lao Tao' (嘞头) or 'Lao B' (嘞B). (my emphasis)

Interviewer: Why?

*Sun Ying: It is the way we call people who come from other provinces 'Lao Tao' or 'Lao B'...I think it is because they don't speak Cantonese. They've got very strong accents of the North...They **look very stupid** so we call them 'lao'.*

Interviewer: How about those female migrant workers? Do they have any particular nick names? (my emphasis)

Sun Ying: As far as I know, we call all peasant workers 'Lao Tao' or 'Lao B'. But it seems that it refers to men. I don't know any other name for women.

The above conversations with Yu Ke and Sun Ying illustrate the important role of a local language in maintaining social distance and accompanying unequal power relations between (male) migrant workers and local residents. For Bourdieu (1991) language has a central capacity to create 'symbolic domination'. For example, according to Thompson (1991:12) language creates a cultural habitus, which serves to secure the domination of a ruling class, facilitating a process of symbolic violence upon less powerful individuals or collectivities. For example, 'Lao B' means slag in Cantonese, which results in peasant workers being named as 'others'. In Chinese Cantonese, 'Lao', according to Sun Ying is

associated with primitive, backward, stupid and foolish. 'B' has a colloquial connotation with a female's vagina. The term 'Lao B' appears as a cultural signifier used by urban residents to name male peasant workers as culturally different and in the process establish their superiority over people from outside Guangdong. Urban citizens in other cities in Guangdong refer to male peasant workers in their own local ways, such as naming them as 'monkeys'.

Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007:30-31) maintain that 'particular social relations in localized contexts enables us to map out the material, cultural and psychic (unconscious) practices and constraints that produce formations of masculinity.' A key concern of this chapter is that in exploring the public gaze and the cultural production of masculinities we need to address the specificity of the power relations operating within the post-Mao modernization period. Within the hegemonic discourse of modernization, according to Connell (1995), men (and women) are able to position other men in relation to themselves as being in subordinated, complicit or marginalized relationships within different social contexts and situations. The power relations emanating from the national discourse of modernization are important in defining the position of male peasant workers in the city. Within a Chinese context, the public gaze and the cultural production of working class migrant masculinities is a result of complex sets of interconnecting power relations. According to Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007), when we think about power relations, it is important to think about power relation to whom. Song (2004) argues that the formation of a Chinese masculine ideal is not imagined in opposition to women but within a situation where different hierarchies of social and political power operate.

One of the major limitations of structuralist-based accounts of class classification in examining the position of the peasant workers is that they are not able to address the multiple categories of social inequality and cultural difference operating with contemporary societies. In response, adapting new feminist accounts, working within a British Cultural Studies tradition, that suggest the need to focus on the intersectionality of categories, including gender, class and ethnicity, enables us to examine the cultural formation, identity and subjectivity of men and meanings of masculinities (Skeggs, 1997; Reay, 1998) (see Chapter Five and Chapter 6). For example, such an approach opens up our analysis to interpret, in the above extract, the linking of male peasant workers with a colloquial reference to a female's vagina, as part of a broader process of the feminization of the men. This resonates with post-colonial accounts of the deployment of dominant state power to feminize colonial and diasporic men and masculinities (Brah et al. 2000; Salih, 2003). In other words, dominant power relations are marked by a discourse of 'internal orientalism' (Schein, 1997), which is of central importance in creating 'otherness' within Chinese modernization.

In addressing the intersectionality of power relations of the public gaze and cultural production of Chinese working class masculinities, we might also explore the western notion of racism. Hall (1992b:16) describes how racism works in relation to cultural difference by being 'directed to secure us "over here" and them "over there", to fix each in its appointed species place.' Solinger (1999b) has compared China's rural-urban migrants with ethnic migrants in western societies, such as Germany and Japan. In my case, the 'racialization' of peasant workers also provides a contextual language that facilitates the cultural production of the male peasant workers' masculinity that locates them in a

relatively powerless position within urban settings. As Mac an Ghaill (1999) argues, the reproduction of racial inequalities can help to formulate male identities, in this case, the inequality resulting from the rural/urban – North/South and West/East dualism.

In terms of living with difference, if the notion of the intersectionality of categories is conceptually productive, as illustrated above, it appears to have less salience politically. I found no sense of a cultural politics emerging that might begin to problematize the pervasive ideological positioning of the male peasant workers by elite commentators and established urban residents. The latter tend to operate within a fixed social world of modernization ‘winners’ (us) and ‘losers’ (them). Future research in this area of inquiry might address possible alternative futures for peasant workers, in terms of class mobilization and/or a cultural politics of difference that acknowledges the complex interconnections of multiple power relations.

4.4: Conclusion

This chapter has critically examined the public gaze and the cultural production of masculinities. It historically traces the discursive formation of peasant workers from the pre-reform to the post-Mao reform period. It explores shifting and contradictory representations of Chinese (male) peasant workers within public narratives - government, media and art - in order to problematize their portrayal that circulate across public arenas. Such representations are important in contextualizing rural-urban migrating masculinities projected as gendered others. Within this context of dominant public representations, the chapter also addresses urban residents’ perspectives of male peasant workers. Importantly,

the chapter explores this public gaze from various sources highlighting the need to address the unequal power relations operating upon the rural men within their urban encounters. There is a focus on the intersectionality of categories, including gender, class and ethnicity, that enables us to examine the feminization and racialization of the migrant working class men. At the same time, it examines how dominant public understandings of these men contribute to their social stratification, including their social positioning in terms of what the peasant workers are perceived to lack within the dominant discourse of post-Mao modernization.

Chapter Five

Family and Migrating Masculine Identities

5.1 Migration, Freedom and Gender Responsibilities

5.2 Men, Rural Families and the Dislocation of Gender Practices during Migration

5.2:1 Gendered work and responsibility within the rural family

5.2:2 The relational gender order within the rural family

5.3 Familial Relations and Migrating Working Class Masculine Identities

5.3:1 Male peasant workers and their migrating urban families

5.3:1-1 *Family reunification: reconstructing the gender order*

5.3:1-2 *(Re)constituting 'relational men' through new family work*

5.3:2 Male peasant workers and their 'left-behind' rural families

5.3:2-1 *'Filial son' living away from home*

5.3:2-1 (1) Changing practice as a 'filial son'

5.3:2-1 (2) Inescapable responsibility

5.3:2-2 *Parenting, fatherhood and migration*

5.3:2-2 (1) 'I don't expect my son to look after me.'

5.3:2-2 (2) Good father or bad father?

5.4 Classing the Self: Constructing Emotional Migrating Masculinities

5.5 Conclusion: Family Practices and Migrating Masculine Identities

5.1 Migration, Freedom and Gender Responsibilities

*'Freedom is
Running from my door
on a dark night
Pounding through the streets
in the lamplight
Striding in a wind
on the green hill
Trading secret paths
through the wild flowers
Fears falling fast*

*far behind me.
...
...This freedom is
Impossible
You are not allowed
Nor allow yourself.
Running?
Standing so free?
Imagine!'
---R. Johnson (1996:95)*

In Chapter Four, I presented contemporary public representations of male peasant workers that portrayed them in highly negative images as 'modernization losers'. A main aim of Chapter Five and Chapter Six is to explore the men's self-representations. There is a tendency in the literature on migration to focus on the public world of peasant workers' lives, for example, in relation to workplace, housing and civil society. I follow a similar pattern in Chapter Six that explores the participation and identity formation of male peasant workers within urban workplaces. However, this emphasis on public domains in the literature on migration serves to capture spaces that are traditionally ascribed to men's lives. What are excluded in this masculinising process are the ascribed feminine domains of 'private spaces'. In response, this chapter investigates masculine identity formation in relation to their family lives. Their narratives allow access to a more intimate world of male peasant workers' experience of rural-urban labour migration, such as their emotional connection with their families. I suggest that traditional gender values associated with the patriarchal family, in terms of gender roles and responsibilities are lived out by these men in modern Chinese society even though

migration has changed the family structure. More specifically, a central argument of the chapter is that reworked familial practices and traditional gender values have become important resources in the construction of the men's identities that serve to sustain their families in new and difficult material conditions. The men's sense of dislocation in the city is most visibly expressed in relation to their separation from their rural-based families. The chapter specifically focuses upon the gendering of this dislocation, in terms of the men's need to re-invent their relational gendered selves, as husbands/partners, fathers and sons. This critical perspective captures the major limitations of public representations that reductively position these men as 'modernization losers'.

In migrating to cities, these working class men have found that they are physically dislocated from their rural environments, where gender roles and responsibilities are precisely prescribed, to a modern urban space where gender practices and responsibilities have to be negotiated without the physical presence of one's partner and family. For these men, rural-urban labour migration is a process of moving from a place where their gendered familial identity entitled them to a position of power, to a modern space where their domestic masculine identities are unstable. This instability in family life is one of the main issues raised by male peasant workers about the impact of migration on their everyday lives. For some men, it is a path which enables them to escape traditional gender obligations and responsibilities. However, as an integral part of society, especially in a traditional society such as China, the family continues to be seen as a central element of their habitus in all of the men's lives (Skeggs, 1997).

Within a Chinese context, female peasant workers have challenged the configuration of gender relations both inside and outside their rural families, as has been illustrated by Jacka (1997). More generally, for feminist research, a key change, resulting from a global modernity based labour migration to find work in urban settings has been to empower women to challenge pre-existing gender relations in patriarchal Chinese society (see Chapter Two, section 2.2:3-2). In the literature, the discussion of gender equality and potential benefits for women has become central in relation to internal labour migration and family relations. However, what tends to be absent is that social relations within the family for male peasant workers are also changing, primarily due to their absence from their rural families. Hence, gender relations from a male perspective are also under challenge and require renegotiation. To what extent working class men and masculinities within the context of traditional rural families have been challenged and (re)constructed in the process of rural-urban labour migration and how this process of movement reconstitutes familial gender relations is what I investigate in this chapter.

Western literature on gender and the family, such as Morgan (1996; 2001), argues that family is a set of social interactions that take place between gendered individuals. Within these interactions, individual subjects are constituted within the family, while at the same time social relations are performed through gender relations in family practices. Smart and Neale (1999:21) comment on Morgan's (1996) notion of 'family practice' claiming that it emphasizes fluidity of family relationships which 'allow us to conceptualize how family "practices" overlap with other social practices (e.g., gendering practices, economic practices and so on).' Of importance, such emphasis on practice can

provide a critical understanding of meanings of masculinity and femininity in family relations.

Family is a key analytical area of inquiry within the Chinese literature on gender and migration (Li, Q. 2001; Yao, 2001; Gaetano and Jacka, 2004). The high rate of rural-urban labour migration does not only result in high mobility of the rural population and a mass relocation of rural families, but also the dislocation of gender roles and practices, as indicated by emerging social issues involving the absence of fathers, husbands/partners and sons. Meanwhile, some studies have shown evidence that gender relations are becoming more equal in the process of rural-urban labour migration. For example, Gaetano and Jacka (2004) maintain that internal labour migration empowers rural women by providing autonomy from a patriarchal familial culture. However, men's absence from rural families means their masculinities emanating from their family relations are being relocated from the spaces where their male responsibilities are possibly (dis)located, to new urban spaces where they need to (re)construct their masculinities to adjust to emerging new social relations. During my research I found that although peasant workers were away from their rural households, in their narratives about their experience in the process of migration, they constantly referred to connections to their family, to which they were still strongly attached and which they claimed helped them to maintain and reshape their identities in the city. Family has become a key institution of (re)constituting migrating masculinities for Chinese male peasant workers regardless of geographical origins and age differences. Life changing experiences were reported by nearly all the male peasant workers I interviewed, either negatively, in terms of losing their authority by being absent from their rural family, or

positively, by providing opportunities to construct more open and mobile masculinities for young male peasant workers. In response to these narratives, the chapter seeks to investigate a key absence in the literature, the relation between family and the (re)construction of male subjectivities in the process of migration.

Through the analysis of the data from the fieldwork, this chapter explores the gendered and classed habitus (i.e. relational gender subjective identities), emanating from their family lives in their current material locations, which constituted one of the major themes in my interviews with them (Skeggs, 1997; Kraus, 2006). It sets out to explore how working class masculinities have been (re)constructed and how the meanings of practices have been redefined, given the changing family structure accompanying migration. I will critically explore the dynamics in the social and cultural formations of masculinities in relation to the male peasant workers' narratives about how they negotiate and (re)construct their domestic masculine identities in new urban spaces. It also aims to illustrate diverse accounts in terms of masculine identity formation from different age groups. By the end of the chapter, it is hoped to have illustrated through their narratives a highly complex process (economic, cultural, as well as psychological) of the constitution of their migrating masculine identities.

5.2 Men, Rural Families and the Dislocation of Gender Practices during Migration

Family, in Chinese translation – *Jia*, is the basic social group in rural China, as acknowledged by anthropologists and sociologists (see Fei, 2008). For Fei (2008), who defines the family in rural China as 'an expanded family',

‘A *Chia* (same as *jia*) is essentially a family but it sometimes includes children even when they have grown and married. Sometimes it also includes some relatively remote patrilineal kinsmen.’ (Fei, 2008:27)

According to Fei (2008) the ‘parent-child’ and the ‘husband-wife’ relationships are the two axes in the Chinese family marked by patriarchy based on the Confucian gender order. Within the *jia*, men’s practices in terms of their domestic gender role plays an integral element in the construction of masculine subjectivities, which were acknowledged by nearly all the male peasant workers I interviewed. For example, they began their life histories by talking about their obligations as ‘the man of the home’ or ‘the master of the home’ to their families. This was understood as the primary motivation for moving to work in the city, in order to support their rural family who often experienced poverty. More recently, research from women’s accounts on gender in rural Chinese families has been predominantly concerned with unequal gender relations (Jacka, 1997; Matthews and Nee, 2000), highlighting the privileged domination of men’s roles and the rigid gender norms operating within the family marked by patriarchy, filial responsibility and patrimonialism, according to Confucian tradition. I argue in this thesis that alongside the changing role of women in Chinese society in the past twenty years due to economic reform, men, as the other gender group, are also encountering significant change during this transformation period. Michael Kimmel (1996) notes, “by gender I mean the sets of cultural meanings and prescriptions that each culture attaches to one’s biological sex” (Kimmel, 1996:2). Family in traditional Chinese culture has tended to be highly gendered with clearly prescribed meanings and prescriptions for women and men. A focus on migrating working class men and masculinities in relation to the private domain of family may serve to support feminist

research in further denaturalizing the taken for granted assumptions about the current gendered divisions in the changing rural household.

5.2:1 Gendered work and responsibility within the rural family

The traditional model of a Chinese rural family is ‘man for the field and woman for the needle’ or ‘men plough, women weave’ (Jacka, 1997:25 男耕女织). Representing men’s work in terms of the plough with its associated meaning of outdoors and masculinity cannot exist without its opposite, women’s work represented as weaving and its association with indoors and femininity. Jacka (1997) captures the gender divisions of labour in rural China as a structured series of binaries: ‘inside’/ ‘outside’, ‘private’/‘public’ and ‘light’/‘heavy’. She notes that ‘the Confucian ideal of women being confined to the “inside” sphere of family and home contributed to a division of labour, such that domestic work was largely done by the women of the family, or in households of the gentry, by female servants’ (ibid.:22). Therefore, men in this context were associated with public labour (outside), while women occupied the opposite domain. Being a man in rural China was about responsibility. Such responsibility was relational to the needs of women and to other family members. (Gendered work in a rural context is further discussed in Chapter Six).

Alongside men’s key role in the family as financial provider and ‘master of the house’, which has been seen as privileging them in the familial gender structure, they also have the responsibility of passing on the family name and taking care of parents when they

are old. This domestic responsibility is accompanied by a cultural assumption of men's supremacy within the traditional gender order. This is reflected through the preference for a son rather than a daughter, as exemplified in the saying, 'more sons, more fortune' (多子多福) or 'to bring up a son for the purpose of being looked after in old age' (养儿防老), which exemplifies the traditional familial gender ideology in China. Men's role in the family is highly prescribed within Chinese society. Arnold and Liu (1986:226) point out that 'traditionally, sons in China were considered advantageous for two economic reasons: support for their parents in old age and the provision of labour for the farm or family business'. The preference for a son rather than a daughter suggests the cultural expectation of the responsibility that men must take in the family. The responsibility of being a privileged gender in the family is legitimated primarily through their ascribed need to act as the 'financial supplier' of the family; a gender obligation that is culturally authorised on the grounds of ensuring social and gender order. That is, there are cultural as well as economic reasons that men occupy a relatively advantaged position in the family from which dominant meanings of masculinity and femininity can be identified.

5.2:2 The relational gender order within the rural family

The working class men I interviewed have grown up believing that women were responsible for taking care of their married family and parents-in-law. 'Marry a cockerel and follow a cockerel, marry a dog and follow a dog---throw in one's lot with one's husband' (嫁鸡随鸡, 嫁狗随狗) spelt out the gender order in traditional Chinese

culture, with women dependent on their fathers before their marriage, on their husbands after marriage and on their sons when they are old. The peasant workers inhabited a social world where until recently there was a rigid gender order within traditional Chinese culture as indicated above, where men and women were assigned to their relational gendered positions within family relations. Ideals of masculinity and femininity are subsumed within Confucian social relations of the family and other social institutions within which men's dominant position is generally placed over women (Louie, 2002:10). This resonates with Connell's (1993: 601) understanding of masculinity as men's places and practices in gender relations that 'are symbolically represented and constructed in men's life course'.

At the same time, Jacka (1997) argues that gender relations in terms of power are not a pre-given phenomenon within specific places and are not fixed within a Chinese context. As she maintains rather than accepting the presumption of a single meaning offered by a structuralist approach, researchers need to draw on post-structuralism and to 'ask *how*, that is through what social processes and relations of power, meanings and values are acquired in specific societies at specific times, and how those meanings and values change'. (ibid.: 18) In other words, she believes familial gender divisions are open to change within different historical periods. Indeed, contemporary experience of rural-urban labour migration provides opportunities for women to challenge pre-existing gender norms, as feminist studies have illustrated. In turn, this challenge to pre-existing gender norms within rural areas also affects men, who face complex changes and challenges within this process, in terms of the formation of their working class masculinity and a shifting male role (Savage, 2005).

With reference to men and the family, the notion of fatherhood in China, which is influenced by traditional Confucian philosophy, is of key importance in understanding Chinese familial gender relations and gender hierarchy and it is particularly important in defining Chinese familial masculinities (the gendered habitus). For example, ‘father-son’ relations have a great impact upon gender relations in traditional Chinese culture in terms of social hierarchy. Such a metaphor is applied extensively to broader social and gender hierarchies within society. Zhao (2007:2) theorizes the privileged position of men in the family from a Confucian perspective, within which gender norms in relation to kinship contributes to the patriarchal gender relations within China that have been criticized by feminist analysis. However, Zhao (ibid.) also notes the central material and symbolic significance of ‘father-son’ relations within Chinese kinship to the wider society:

‘In Confucian society, the kinship family is the cornerstone of society because, in the traditional Confucian mind, society is itself an enlarged family and the family is in turn a miniature society. Therefore, the ruler and the father are endowed with the same function; the king in his country and the father in his home hold the same position.’ (Zhao, 2007:2)

Meanwhile, Fei (1992) argues that in traditional agricultural societies such as China, collective needs are important to the survival of individuals, represented by the central role of the family in people’s lives. Given this specific cultural meaning, men’s privileged position in terms of relational gender roles in the family are also subject to potential change when people are faced with the collective benefit of the survival of the family, which is currently experienced by the peasant workers in the context of the modernization project and its accompanying rapid socio-economic and cultural changes.

This essential value associated with the welfare of the family within Chinese culture is of importance for individuals to make sense of themselves in relational terms, as I discussed in Chapter Two. Later in the chapter, I will explore the impact of the modernisation project as played out in terms of the rural-urban migration in transforming men's relational role and position in the family and whether it serves to challenge stereotypical gender roles and meanings within traditional Chinese familial culture.

In summary, the issue of rural-urban labour migration is conventionally understood primarily as an economically motivated behaviour resulting in male peasant workers migrating to work in local cities; while at the same time, public representations of these men's roles in the family are projected as having been dislocated within this process of geographical movement. The working class men's self-representations, captured in my recorded life histories alongside participant observation, presented more complex, multi-layered accounts. I found that the men maintained strong links with their rural families, as they had internalised the traditional cultural expectation that 'the man of the house' should support the economic welfare of their families. At the same time, social practices in relation to their family life as a central element of their habitus had become a major resource in the construction of their urban masculine identities, associated with the dislocation of their rural-based pre-migration masculinities (Lawler, 2008; Kraiss and William, 2000). Such geographical relocation leads to potential changes, as well as a series of conflicts and contradictions that challenged the (re)construction of rural men's survival masculinities in urban spaces.

5.3 Familial Relations and Migrating Working Class Masculine Identities

Classical ‘push-pull’ economic theories of migration are no longer sufficient in making sense of Chinese male peasant workers’ motivations and experiences. Earlier on during my fieldwork in China, as indicated above, I found that the male peasant workers were conscious about their gendered responsibilities and practices in relation to family life, which served as a centrally important cultural resource in their masculine identity formation. In this section, I categorize their narratives into two main themes – ‘male peasant workers and their migrating urban families’ and ‘male peasant workers and their ‘left-behind’ rural families’. The narratives were analyzed in terms of their family related relational gender roles, with reference to being husbands/partners, fathers, sons, and brothers and across different generations in order to map out the complex performance and enactment of masculine identity formation within family life. More specifically, this section aims to capture the complex interplay between continuities and discontinuities of familial gender relations in the formation of male peasant workers’ experiences of dislocated urban masculinities (McNay, 2008).

5.3:1 Male peasant workers and their migrating urban families

I start by focussing on male peasant workers’ identity formation through an investigation of familial gender practices within their new constituted urban families. This will provide a more comprehensive and critical understanding of the changing

gender order and accompanying gender relations with reference to emerging working class domestic masculinities.

5.3:1-1 Family reunification: reconstructing the gender order

Connell (1987:98-99) defines gender order as ‘a historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women and definitions of femininity and masculinity’. Research has suggested the ‘agriculturalisation of females’ (Gao, 1994) or ‘agricultural feminization’ (Song and Zhang, 2004) due to out-going male peasant workers resulting in ‘female-dominated’ villages. Feminist accounts of ‘rural women being left behind’ have argued that it has the potential to be an empowering process that provides opportunities for women to be independent from their families (See chapter 2). This structurally-based social and gendered change within rural families has intensified with the rapid increase in migrant women. In my research I found that as more rural women went to work in the city, some of their ‘left-behind’ husbands and partners (male peasant workers) joined them.

Women tend to join their husbands once they marry. This is seen as maintaining the traditional gender order within Chinese society, illustrating women’s dependence on men. However, as the tendency of migration among rural women increases, feminist research suggests that a new more complex gender dynamics is emerging in terms of family practices, representing by rural women being away from their fathers, husbands/partners (see Jacka, 1997; Whyte, 1992). This new social phenomenon

resonates with western feminist research on changes in the household and familial gender relations. For example, Walby (1990) argues that:

‘Women are no longer necessarily bound to an individual husband who expropriates their labour till death does them part...Women spend a smaller proportion of their life-time’s labour under patriarchal relations of production, although while they are full-time housewives they spend many hours on this labour as did women many decades earlier.’ (Walby, 1990:89)

Such changes of gender relations with reference to women also impacts on men. The data I collected reveals that rural men in contemporary Chinese society are willing to make compromises within a traditional gender order in exchange for the opportunity to unite the family unit which appeared extremely dysfunctional when they lived away from their rural-based families. For example, some of them have challenged the existing gender order by following their wives to work and live in the city. In this process, they have to renegotiate the meanings of traditional gender norms in response to existing material conditions, involving both familial formation and an economic rationale.

Lao Tang (48 years old) was a domestic household cleaner. Three years ago, he gave up his relatively well paid job in the construction sector to work with his family in Shantou. While discussing the reason for coming to work here, he also suggested how he felt he had to compromise his masculinity status in relation to his family and (re)construct his masculine identity in the urban space.

Interviewer: Why did you decide to move to Shantou?

Lao Tang: (I came here for) my wife and my daughter... My daughter was the first person who came here, then my wife. I am the last person who came here... They said it was easy to make money here. And I think it would be better

being together with your family. They said it is good to work here... I am getting old... and I don't think I can do building work anymore soon.

Interviewer: But you couldn't earn much money...

Lao Tang: No, I couldn't find a job here at the beginning, so I started to work with my wife and daughter...People think it is 'mei chu xi' (good for nothing) to stay with your wife when I was at the old home.

Interviewer: Why?

Lao Tang: It is not like a family if the 'yi jia zhi zhu' (master of the family) is not around so I decided to move in with my family. It is hard to be a father and husband when you are working away from home. You need to earn money.

A number of male peasant workers' narratives resonated with Lao Tang's account. Economic conditions have been a central element in changing the conventional gender order within peasant workers' families. Lao Tang gave up his relatively high waged job to move to live with his family in order to sustain his wife and daughters' good jobs in Shantou. In so doing, he inverted the traditional social practice of women moving to the location where men were working. His comments revealed his subordinated status within an emerging neo-liberal market economy, with a real sense that the traditional understanding of masculinity has been dislocated and marginalized within the dominant modernization discourse of economic progress. In this case, men, such as Lao Tang appear not to be in control of their families as would have been normal for their fathers' generation. The patriarchal gender order in terms of female dependence on men became less visible within the male peasant workers' narratives with similar experiences to Lao Tang.

Meanwhile, the city provides a space in which the new gendered conditions are deployed as a major resource to (re)construct their masculine identities, as husbands/partners and fathers, and in this process re-assert a patriarchal stance. For example, for Lao Tang, as a new arrival without any contacts he could not find a job in the city. Without social contacts, in other words, social capital, which is much needed by peasant workers for networking, he had to rely on his wife's and daughter's networking skills to introduce him to potential employers. This resulted in his working with his wife and daughter as a domestic house cleaner. In other words, they became the centre of his networking and a resource for (re)constructing his self identity in their life together in the city. Therefore, Lao Tang had to negotiate his masculine identity by moving from his rural home and accompanying extended family to live with his wife and daughter, as well as accommodating himself within the urban workplace, while being conscious of a sense of failure for being dependent on his wife and working in a traditional female-dominated occupation. (I will discuss this further in relation to work and masculinity in next chapter, exploring how he negotiated and constructed his identity in a non-traditional male job as a domestic cleaner). More broadly, his life history account raises questions about the emergence of an unstable patriarchal gender regime, operating during the process of internal migration within a contemporary 'modern' urban-based China. For men like Lao Tang, the major paradox was that their work relied on the networking of their female family members as they became the 'followers' and 'dependants' in the family unit, while at the same time, this enabled them culturally and symbolically to remain the 'master' of the family. The male peasant workers' narratives highlight the complexity of such processes of (re)constructing

masculine identities that help them to deal with the contemporary situation in which the traditional gender order has rapidly changed in the process of migration.

At the same time, it is important to note that the continuity of tradition within a context of changing social practices in terms of men fulfilling their relational gender roles as husbands/partners and fathers in urban social contexts is important in maintaining family life, which as pointed out above, continues to be of central significance in the gendered habitus of the day to day lives of Chinese people (Lawler, 2008). Urban family life for male peasant workers, both female and male, challenges the traditional notion of the rural family. The emergence of female peasant workers has empowered women to take the lead in the maintenance and reproduction of the family. As the men in my study claim: ‘men now follow in their wives’ footsteps to work in the city’ in order to maintain the harmony and unity of families and develop better futures’ for their children. The men commented on how housework was no longer a gendered task partly due to the demands of their families’ relatively high paced lifestyle. Men were no longer the only economic ‘bread winner’, however, symbolically, the cultural stereotype of being the head of the family for the sake of the welfare of the family was still in place. Hence, they reported the need to sacrifice their culturally inherited traditional male dignity by moving with their families and working in undesirable jobs as a result of both economic and cultural reasoning. I will discuss this further in next chapter by focusing on masculinities and work.

5.3:1-2 (Re)constituting 'relational men' through new family work

As argued in the Literature Review, most of the work on gender and migration has focused on women's experiences. Theoretically, this is partly a result of the significance of feminist research in addressing contemporary gender issues (Pun, 2005; Jacka, 2005a; Yan, 2008). Politically, this work is of major importance given the gendered exploitation of female peasant workers in Chinese patriarchal society. An unintended effect of this focus is not only that men and masculinity have been under-researched. Equally important, the gendering of family dynamics also tends to be absent from the literature. More specifically, the complexity of shifting inter-personal and inter-generational gendered relations needs to be addressed.

Lao Tang's account above also illustrates the adjustment of inter-personal relations among migrating family members in the city. Many male peasant workers revealed that they needed to adopt new familial roles and gender practices that contested the traditional rural binary division that associated men with work outside (in the field) and women with work inside (the home). These new familial roles served as important resources in the (re)construction of their relational gender identity. Such practices which broke with tradition were located within the specific material conditions operating within the process of migration. For example, the men claimed that as a result of both husbands and wives needing to work outside the home, they needed to do a greater share of domestic work that used to be allocated to women. However, it did not seem like an obligation and responsibility, but rather the new gender meanings were developed and lived out through new domestic practices from which they made sense of their relational

masculine identity as husband, son and father in the material location of modern urban spaces.

Of importance, for example, for a younger generation, such as Xiao Cai (20 years old), who worked with his parents in Shantou was that his new domestic responsibilities had given him a sense of his position within his family as a sensible son. He and his parents did not work at the same place as some other families did. He worked during normal hours from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at a chemical factory. However, his parents worked different shifts. His father, as a security guard needed to work at nights. His mother worked in a garment factory where she finished at eight in the evening. Hence, as a member of a working class family who cannot afford to employ a domestic, Xiao Cai took responsibility to cook the dinner after his paid work and collected his mother from work at night.

Xiao Cai: My father's work is like 24 hours, sometimes he just stays there at night. I don't usually need to cook for him...Everyday I go to the market after work to get some food and to cook the dinner. And then I pick up my mother from the factory by bike.

Interviewer: Why do you need to pick up your mum?

Xiao Cai: Because it is too late at night, it is not safe for her to come home alone. My father does it (pick up my mother) when he does not need to work.

Interviewer: Do you do all the house work?

Xiao Cai: Most of it during the week. My mum does it at the weekend when she is off work.

Interviewer: How do you feel doing all this?

Xiao Cai: There must be someone doing the cooking and housework if your family are all at work...my working hours allow me to help my parents.

Interviewer: Do you give your wages to your parents?

Xiao Cai: Yes, I give some to my mum. The rest is spent on family needs, like water, electricity, food sometimes... We all work very hard to earn money. As a son, you should be *dongshi* (sensible) and help your family. We cannot hire a 'baomu'¹ like many urban residents do.

For younger male peasant workers there had been a fundamental shift in the Chinese highly prescribed gender-specific domestic habitus (Krais, 2006:121), within which their parents operated and within which their peers in rural areas continued to operate. Within traditional tightly bounded gendered meanings, sons hold a privileged position. As outlined above, the preference for sons over daughters was based on the economic rationale that sons would provide future labour for the farm or business and therefore be able to support older parents. Currently, younger male peasant workers, such as Xiao Cai, find themselves having a major responsibility for the home, traditionally the space of the female, and with economic and social responsibility for his parents, traditionally the role of the father and mother. When his father was away, he took over his father's practices, for example, taking care of his mother. When his mother was at work, he took over her duty to do the housework. For this younger generation, family related gender practices (i.e. as a son in Xiao Cai's case) are of importance for them to grow up as a man. Xiao Cai made sense of his domestic practices as evidence of acting as a sensible son, which resonated with the traditional notion of a 'filial son', that is, taking care of one's elderly parents. Most importantly, these modified familial gender roles as son, husband/partner and father have become a fundamental resource in the formation of their identities, serving to make sense of their position in the process of modernization.

¹ See Yan (2008) in Chapter Two.

In so doing, rather than modernization displacing traditional familial ideology, the reworked gendered interplay of domestic roles, duties and responsibilities between the generations enables a modern family unit to establish itself within the city. At the same time, their reworked gendered habitus is shaped by gender familial practices that are developed within subordinated class based material conditions compared to established urban dwellers (Skeggs, 1997; Reay, 2005).

5.3:2 Male peasant workers and their 'left-behind' rural families

Alongside the male peasant workers who moved from the rural areas with family members to work together in the city, many of the male peasant workers I interviewed lived alone in the city, being apart from their families. Feminist theorists argue that although traditional Confucian ethics in terms of gender and family relations is now criticised within the context of China's pursuit of modernization, to a large extent, the rural family still maintains traditional ways of life in terms of gender norms, marked by patriarchy. For example, research on Chinese rural female peasant workers that I discussed in Chapter Two (see section 2.2:3) has highlighted that rural women still cannot escape the control of the rural patriarchal family, within which the authority of the father and its associated cultural norms continue to control their life even though they are away from home living in cities. Chu Tung-tsu's (1961) study of *Law and Society in Traditional China* stresses the domination and the authoritarianism of the figure of the father in the family,

‘The Chinese family was patriarchal. The grandfather or father was the ruling head and had authority over all the members of the family, including his wife and concubines, his sons and grandsons, their wives and children, his unmarried daughters, his collateral relatives who were junior to him and who shared his domicile, his slaves and servants. His control of the family economy and his power to make financial decisions strengthened his authority. In addition, since the concept of ancestor worship was central to the perpetuation and solidarity of the family, the authority of the family head, who was also the family priest, was further enhanced. Finally, his authority was recognized and supported by the law.’ (Chu, 1961:20)

In my research, the men’s narratives provide evidence of structural change within peasant workers’ families due to the physical absence of being a son, father and husband/partner. In other words, rural-urban labour migration is a practice that is troubling the visibility of being a man through their missing roles in the family household. In turn, these narratives highlight that men’s migration from rural areas to the city has resulted in the dislocation of men’s familial gender practices.

5.3:2-1 ‘Filial son’ living away from home

As suggested above, securing family life is one of the key motivations for contemporary internal migration. The men did not abandon their rural families in the process of labour migration due to the Chinese cultural tradition of seeing family as a central part of life. Working in the cities means that Chinese male peasant workers had the opportunity to provide a better life for their families through subsidising the family’s finances. While they were experiencing a new life in urban China, their responsibilities to their rural families became intensified in their daily work and domestic practices. In my empirical work, an important manifestation of the urgency and immediacy of maintaining familial

connections was expressed in their narratives about being a son. More specifically, the men spoke of the shifting meanings around filial responsibilities.

5.3:2-1 (1) Changing practice as a ‘filial son’

Traditional gender practices associated with filial responsibilities are being challenged with the emerging economic development in urban China, providing material opportunities for Chinese rural men to support their rural families. Most significantly, the symbolic meaning of filial piety has been transformed from social practices *within* the family to social practices *away from* the family.

Jian Xiaoping (38 years old): My home is in the mountain area. My parents are peasants. They sell some produce at the town market... But we live far from town, our income is low.

...I am the oldest son in the family, after completing my military duty and leaving the army (当兵复员), I left home to work in the city, leaving my parents, a younger brother and a younger sister at home... I have the responsibility to take care of my parents and my brother and sister. Although I can't be with my family, man should have high aspirations wherever he goes (志在四方). (But) I have the responsibility to earn money and be filial to my parents.

Hui Ying (33 years old): I can't say I am a filial son as I am away from home... They are getting older and sometimes getting ill because of their age. Nothing serious, but a lot of small diseases, like sometimes there is something wrong with the nose and joints when the season changes, high blood pressure... I have the will but don't have the ability to take good care of my parents (because I am away)... I call them every week and ask them to take good care of themselves... Really I hope nothing serious happens to them... But I must say I am definitely a filial son. I have to work to earn money.

‘Respecting and caring for the aged’ is a traditional Chinese moral ethic. Such a traditional ethic played an important role for the Chinese male peasant workers, such as Jiang and Hui, in making sense of their relational male identity as a filial son. As I suggested above, being a young man in the family means you will take care of your parents when they are old. Fei’s (2008:29) anthropological research on peasant life in China acknowledges an essential characteristic of the family is that ‘married sons do not always leave their parents, especially when either father or mother is dead’. This is also why Chinese people have a son-preference culture, which is perceived as a life insurance for the future, while daughters will become family members of their husbands’ family. However, rural-urban labour migration is challenging this gender norm of what it means ‘to be a son’ and ‘to be a man for the family’ within conditions of widespread separation of male family members from rural households. From a contemporary western perspective, produced by late modernity ‘do-it-yourself’ biographies (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1994), it is difficult to make sense of the ethical claims that an older generation makes on a younger generation within China. This ethic of responsibility is a traditional imperative for young men, for whom filial responsibility is codified in highly prescribed ways. It is performed and enacted within the everyday dynamics of extended family life. Within the context of rural multi-generational families, one of the most significant cultural apprenticeships is that of the ‘passing on’ of filial duties and obligations from father to son as central to the formation of the domestic habitus. These duties and obligations form part of an intricate pattern of parental expectations underpinned by the immediate physical contact of young men’s close geographical location to their parents and grandparents.

The peasant workers suggested that their current experience, involving negative and positive elements, have forced them to rework the traditional values of filial piety that they inherited. Being able to provide better financial and material support as part of the modernizing project has become one of the key components of being a good son. For example, many male peasant workers, such as Wang Hai, who have parents in rural areas, have found such alternative ways to practice their filial piety as an absent son. In turn, through these practices, they found alternative ways to express their sense of masculine identity which was characterized by combining *independence from* their parents with *responsibility to* their parents.

Wang Hai (32 years old): When I first went back home for the new year, I bought two new clothes using the money I earned, one for my father, one for my mother. It was just a small thing, but I felt I was independent and can provide a good life for my family...It felt so good when you saw how happy they were when they received the clothes. I remember when I was a child, my parents were working from dawn until dark for my tuition fees, now I can earn money, being independent and can buy something to show the fulfillment of the duty as a son to them.'

More broadly, for many male peasant workers sending money home to provide a better material life for their rural family has become an important practice to demonstrate their relational masculine identity as a filial son, a responsible husband and a caring father. I will further discuss this later in the chapter.

Interviewer: Did you do the same thing when you were at home?

Yang Hui (45 years old): Now my brother and me give money to my parents. But when I was at home working on the farm, I did not give money to my parents because our life was hard and we had no money to give my parents. But after I went out to work in the city, I send money back home once a month with two hundred yuan to them and my children.

One example that emerged in the men's narratives of the opportunity opened up by migration was their ability to build a house for their rural family, although for some of them, there was no intention to return home. Sending money back to build a house in their rural homeland appeared to have become a highly visible symbolic sign of masculine behaviour—being the master of the family by providing a better life for their families. For example, when Cai Wu, a 30 years old worker in an electric factory spoke about his life in Shantou, he revealed that his major ambition was to build a new family home.

Cai Wu (30 years old): I work and live here. I like it here. Shantou is a good place. But my family is in Sichuang. My parents, my wife and children are there. I don't feel I am a Shantou person if my family is not here.

Interviewer: Will you go back to Sichuang?

Cai Wu: I don't know. I will either go back to my hometown or bring my family here. Next month, my wife will come to work in Shantou with me. I hope I can bring my children with me soon to make a family here. But a lot of difficulties...education, housing...cost much money (开销很大). I will work hard and make this happen, family is important to me...I will give them the best life as possible as I can...the house at home is under construction now...they will live in the new house soon.

Interviewer: Where do you get the money to build the house?

Cai Wu: Some of the money is my savings in last 5 years...some is borrowed from my friend.

Interviewer: Why do you borrow money to build the house?

Cai Wu: My saving is still not enough...but I have been working outside for several years. The other men who went out with me at the same time are building or have built their new houses back in the village...(I think) it is time to build the new house for my family to show my heart of 'xiao' to my parents, otherwise I will let them down and I don't know where I can hide my face when I go home (embarrassed). I don't want to be in the same situation as my cousin.

He hasn't sent money home to build a house for his family, all the relatives are mourning about him. I don't want people to say I am meibenshi (useless) behind my back.

Initially, when analyzing the data, I had assumed that there would be major generational differences among the male peasant workers. I discuss some of these differences but I realized that in my earlier analysis I was underplaying the generational continuities in terms of values, obligations and responsibilities. The younger generation from an early age had different expectations of rural-urban labour migration and currently had a different generational encounter with urban life. This included a more individualized sensibility and accompanying modern values. However, at the same time, their narratives about family responsibilities exemplified a maturity that I had not expected. This may partly be explained in terms of the interplay between internal material social stratification, family responsibility and the practice of migration. There is a Chinese saying that resonated with my younger interviewees: 'Children of poor families are more likely to take on their responsibilities for their families early' (穷人的孩子早当家). These working young men might have had more freedom and personal choices than their fathers' generation to develop their lives 'without the traditional burden of feeding the family', as one older male peasant worker suggested. However, their inheritance of traditional gender norms was reconstructed in their urban practices in relation to their families. In this process, they are reworking what it means to be a working class 'man' in the city (Savage, 2005). While staying at home taking care of the parents as a traditional symbol of being a filial son is no longer a viable option for them, leaving home to work in the city to ensure a better future for the family is now understood as a

central means of masculine responsibility. In so doing, the men highlight the continuing significance of demonstrating ‘filial piety’ to their parents. As Chow (2009) maintains,

‘...the meaning of filial piety is much broader than simply showing respect. It was recorded in the Book of Rites that the highest level that children should aim to attain in *xiao* was to bring honour to their parents, next was not to bring them disgrace and the least that they could do was to provide them with decent living’ (Chow, 2009:320).

Importantly, such a central familial tradition is creatively reworked and lived out within the interaction with their families.

Ah Fu is a 19 years old male peasant worker who came to work in Shantou a year after he graduated from high school. He was one of the few people in the category of peasant worker who had a high school level education. As one of the latest generation of peasant workers, unlike the older generation I interviewed, he felt at home in the city and was actively engaged in his urban lifestyle. However, he suggested that he never forgot his ‘mission’ for working in the city.

...

Ah Fu: They (parents) ask me not to blow money away and should save the money for my marriage in the future.

Interviewer: Do you send your salary to your parents?

Ah Fu: I keep 200 yuan for daily expenses and send the rest of the money to my parents.

Interviewer: Are you happy sending the money to your parents?

Ah Fu: My family is poor. I give what I can give. They (my parents) asked me not to send money home as they said it’s expensive to live outside. They said they will save the money for my marriage...I am happy that I can send money back home because they have been supporting me for nearly 20 years. It is time for me to repay them...If I were them, I should have got married and have a

child and let them enjoy Tian Lun Zi Le (family happiness with extended generations living together).

Interviewer: Do you have a brother or sister?

Ah Fu: I have an older brother. He works in Shenzhen with my uncle.

Interviewer: Does he send money home?

Ah Fu: Yes. Our family is poor. It is our responsibility to feed our family.

Interviewer: Is 200 yuan enough for you? You don't do shopping?

Ah Fu: Seldom...nothing I can buy. I live and eat in the factory. Things are expensive here. Like clothes, you don't have chance to put it on. I have uniform. You don't wear your nice clothes to work....

For some of the younger male peasant workers, leaving their families was the first time to be away from home 'in the outside world'. For them, the practice of sending home money had a symbolic meaning, marking a transition to maturity. This resonates with Osella and Osella's (2000) anthropological research on young *gulfan*. They understand migration as a process for these young migrants that enables them to grow up and develop as mature men, while displaying financial success as evidence of gender-related progress. More specifically for the young Chinese peasant workers I interviewed, as indicated above, it was a transition that enabled the reworking of the meaning of being a 'filial' son (Chow, 2009). Furthermore, when located within the context of post-Mao modernization, the reinvention of being a 'filial son' entailed an historical specificity of progress and development.

The young men were aware that their need to reinvent the meaning of what it means to be a 'good son' was breaking a long tradition that they had witnessed in their early lives been lived out by their fathers, uncles and grandfathers. Their gender identities were

constructed in the process of such daily interactions within familial relations. For example, it was significant for them to be a financial provider for the family, as exemplified by Ah Fu, as a symbolic practice of being a filial son, aiming to have a happy family with extended generations in a traditional Chinese family way. Furthermore, their break with the past is accompanied by the continuity of inter-generational gendered practices (Ho, 1994). As he reported, Ah Fu's parents were worried about whether he would have enough money for his future marriage. Hence, they saved the money Ah Fu sent to them to enable him to marry, so that he could carry out the traditional obligation as 'man in the family' to pass on the family name. In this process, traditional gender practices live on in their daily familial practices.

In the negotiation of traditional gender values, such as a son's role and responsibility, marriage was reinforced and lived out in this mutual reflexive process between Ah Fu and his family in the material conditions of modernization and development. In other words, the young men knew their duties and expectations in relation to their families, which were articulated through the daily practices and interactions, such as sending money home. Hence, traditional familial values continued to play an important role in the young male peasant workers' construction of their migrating subjectivities within a modern urban context. Wang Tao was a 22 years old factory worker. He recalled his father's advice about his son's career and marriage, locating the traditional obligation 'to feed your family' within contemporary material conditions and opportunities.

Interviewer: Do you have a girlfriend?

Wang Tao: No, I am still young.

Interviewer: You would have married, would you, if you were at home?

Wang Tao: Yes, I think my father married my mum when he was 20. I am too young. My father said man should have ability first (有本事), then get married... should have career first...then you have the ability to feed your family...

Interviewer: Why?

Wang Tao: Now everything is about money. You can't do anything if you don't have money.

Interviewer: Do you always listen to your father?

Wang Tao: Sometimes, he is the master of the family, of course I have to listen to what he said. But unlike he always do whatever my grandfather tells him to do, I don't do everything he want me to do...Just listen...but sometimes what old people say is right...But he is too guban (old-fashioned, inflexible).

Western literature on family and intimacy in post-traditional society suggests that there is lack of intimate personal relations between family members, accompanying an intensified individualization (Beck 1992, 1994; Giddens, 1992). For example, Jamieson (1998), acknowledging Parsons' understanding of family relations in terms of parent-child relationships in the mid-twentieth century, claims that there is a loss of intimate relations between parents and children in the transition from the pre-modern to modern period and that young people need to be self-directed to cope with contemporary rapid social change. A similar approach to research on the Chinese family and intimacy can be found in Yan's (2003) work. She suggests a number of characteristics of the family in contemporary rural China, including 'an increase in youth autonomy, a decline of parental power, and a rise of young women as active agents in family politics' (Yan, 2003:8) that is enabling young people in China to make choices according to personal life aspirations in an attempt to improve their standard of living. In some research, rural-

urban labour migration is reported as providing a generational opportunity for young peasant workers to adopt this more individualized life-style. However, in the young men's narratives that I interviewed, I found little evidence to suggest that this is a universal phenomenon. Further research might address the issue of social class and critically explore whether these individualized biographies tend to be found among sectors of middle-class young people. Interestingly, within a British context, MacDonald et al. (2005) suggest such an explanation, that local networks of family and friends as aspects of cultural inheritance become important social capital in shaping working class youth practices that tend not to adopt individualized biographies.

Migration from rural areas to cities has not weakened the young men's gendered familial responsibility as some research (Mhyte, 2003) has suggested, that urban culture strengthens individualism and weakens traditional familial obligations. Rather, the young men showed remarkable social identification and emotional attachment to their families of origin. The weight and level of responsibilities taken by the young men varied depending on the gender structure of their family. For example, if you were the older son of the family, it meant you had more responsibilities compared to your brother or sister. Alternatively, if you were the only son of the family, the pressure would be heavier than those people who had brothers to share their responsibilities. For example, most importantly, the duty of taking of parents when they were old, alongside the expectations that a younger generation should support their wider extended family.

5.3:2-1 (2) Inescapable responsibility

In the last section the emphasis in the men's narratives was on the re-negotiation of gendered practices. However, there were also some traditional gender norms that were harder to find alternative ways to fulfil. One such issue was getting married and having a child, particularly having a baby boy, in order to carry on the family name.

Interviewer: Do you have children?

Guo Tianhai (32 years old): No.

Interviewer: Do you want to have baby?

Guo Tianhai: Yes, of course. We have been married for about 2 years. I know if I were in the rural area. I would have been expected to get married and then have children. But I think it'd be better if you have children later than earlier... Sometimes it might become a burden if you have a child.

Interviewer: Why?

Guo Tianhai: Look at the news saying the children of peasant workers cannot live with their parents...they cannot go to the local school (because of household registration record)...My relatives always say we should have a baby earlier that when you become old, your child can take care of you. But the reality doesn't allow me to have baby early. (For example), you need to take your baby with you when you go to work. (Or) if your income becomes less, then you have difficulty to raise the baby.

Interviewer: Why do your relatives ask you to have a baby early?

Guo Tianhai: ...I don't know, they care about us, may be the issue of Chuang Zhong Jie dai (Carry on the family name). They might have been guessing I don't have the ability. (he is laughing...)

Interviewer: Does it bother you?

Guo Tianhai: Sometimes, you care about what people are gossiping about you (that you still don't have a baby). Of course I don't feel very well. But you have to think about the difficulties that face you if you have a baby... We want a baby when the conditions allow.

Interviewer: What conditions?

Guo Tianhai: We cannot afford a baby. We have no money.

Guo Tianhai revealed a tension between familial gender responsibilities in terms of practicing traditional duties of being a man within the family and material conditions within modern urban spaces. In traditional Chinese ideology, the worst offence against filial duty is not having any progeny (不孝有三, 无后为大), according to Confucianism (Fei, 2008). In some cases, family expectations, such as carrying on the family name had become a burden for Chinese male peasant workers, when they encountered the difficulty of living and working in the city due to their subordinated class position. Such traditional ideology also affected unmarried young male peasant workers, on whom their parents and extended families placed much pressure to get married as soon as possible when they reached the age of late 20s.

A major theme in the men's narratives was the multiple dilemmas and difficulties that arose from the intense surveillance from traditional patriarchal familial obligations that seemed to have little connection to their lived day to day realities within an urban modern environment. One of my interviewees was Liu Hai (35 years old). He had been a technician at a local electronics factory for ten years since he first left his rural home. In recounting his life history, he expressed the specific dynamics of the impact of pressure from his rural family who had little sense of the demands of his urban lifestyle. He was the only son of his family with three older sisters, so he carried the burden of familial expectations to reproduce the family name by having a baby boy.

Liu Hai (35 years old): My first and the second kids are girls, and the last one is a boy. To be honest, I did not want to give birth to another two children after the first one. You know man and woman are the same...It is not in the old society that you have to have a boy to make your life better. Now girls also can earn money for the family... (But) to my parents, I am their only son. It is my duty to have a son to carry on the family name. They always phoned me and asked me why I didn't want another child. I told them I can't afford to have another child it costs a lot to raise a child here in the city, everything including education in particular...They could not understand me. They said when they were young, they also had several children, some families even had eight girls before they had a boy. They said they came through the difficulty of raising me and my sisters... All my family members urged me to have another child in case it's a boy. But my second child was a girl too. I was so embarrassed. I started to feel, I a bit preferred a boy to girl at that time when I was told it's a girl. I knew it was not good. My family asked me to give the girl away to the other people. But I said no matter how difficult it is, it is my duty to raise her up even though I have to collect rubbish for a living. In the end, I had a boy at last and fulfilled their will two years ago.

Interviewer: Do you prefer a boy to a girl?

Liu Hai: I don't. It is my family that confused me. It is them.

Interviewer: Why?

Liu Hai: Boys and girls are the same to me. But parents always told me and make me embarrassed (if you do not give birth to a boy). My father said in very strong language that our family might end in my generation. It means my family is over. Ok, I fulfilled your will and I work hard. It is my parents' order.

Interviewer: How did you feel when you had your boy?

Liu Hai: I was very happy, to be honest. I held banquets here and in hometown with friends and family members. Very happy, I fulfilled my parents' willingness. After all, family members are watching you.

Migration provides a potential path to move away from the federal system within rural areas for some Chinese male and female peasant workers, as reported in the literature (Pun, 2005; Jacka, 2005a, 2005b). This was not the case for most of the older peasant

workers that I interviewed. However difficult it was to maintain the welfare of the family in a high-cost city life, this did not lead them to abandon their familial responsibilities as defined by their parents. These responsibilities were not only surveyed and policed by one's parents, but also by an extended familial network (i.e. relatives and friends close to the family), as both Guo Tianhai's and Liu Hai's narratives illustrated. For these male peasant workers, family traditions were facing major challenges in terms of the impact of the existing gender order on their lives. This resulted in new generationally-specific material and psychological pressures that were frequently expressed by the male peasant workers. For example, Liu Hai felt embarrassed when his parents urged him to have a boy. His embarrassment or shame² of not being able to carry on the family name illustrated that such a cultural heritage in terms of gender responsibility continued to play a vital role in the formation of their daily practices. It also illustrated the power of the hegemony of patriarchy upon some male peasant workers, such as Liu Hai, who has encountered both economic difficulties of living an urban life, as well as the Chinese government advocating gender equality to practice its one child policy. Sayer (2005:954) maintains, 'the stronger the commonality of values, the greater the possibilities for shaming'. In Liu Hai's case, as he had internalized these values as part of his gendered habitus, he felt embarrassed because he couldn't achieve what was the most important traditional expectation of a filial son.

² Sayer (2005) defines shame as an emotion which 'is evoked by failure of an individual or group to live according to their values or commitments, especially one's concerning their relation to others and goods which others also value'.

In summary, rural-urban labour migration and the urban experience challenged traditional gender familial obligations for the male peasant workers I interviewed. They revealed that they could not simply dissociate from traditional images of the family man from within the context of the city in which they often experienced material constraints. However, familial relationships continued to be lived out through reflexive negotiation of alternative gender practices. This negotiation meant that familial issues such as parenting were not taken for granted as they were by an earlier generation. For example, familial gender roles, such as being a son (examined above) or being a father (examined below) were being challenged within the process of migration.

5.3:2-2 Parenting, fatherhood and migration

As I indicated above, meanings of rural-urban labour migration for the men were constituted through a complex interplay of new and old gendered practices in relation to the maintenance of the family and the rural household. More specifically, rural-urban labour migration constituted a unique situation for the construction of fathering for the Chinese male peasant workers. In traditional rural China, the father's influence on his children increases as the child is growing up (Fei, 2008). In particular, in the case of boys, according to Fei (2008:37), the father is 'the source of discipline', who is characterized as a figure of authority and power within the traditional patriarchal Chinese family. More recently, in the context of rural-urban labour migration, media representations of 'Liushou Ertong' ('left-behind children': children whose parents work in the city, while they are left behind in rural areas with their relatives, grandparents or

with their mothers) are deployed to portray male peasant workers as 'failed fathers'. The concepts of father and fatherhood are currently central to the debate on masculinity and the family. Contemporary western research has presented the formation and the transformation of fatherhood with diverse fathering practices emerging in relation to different cultural and social contexts, such as work and family relations (Morgan, 1996; Brandth and Kvande, 1998, 2002; Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003; Dermott, 2008). For example, the notion of 'new father' who contributes to child care responsibility and domestic work has emerged in western literature (see Ranson, 2001.; Yeung et al. 2001). Meanwhile, changing fatherhood has been captured by western sociologists (Morgan, 1996; LaRossa, 1997; Lupton and Barclay, 1997; Brandth and Kvande, 2002; Dermott, 2008), who have illustrated the transformation of fathering in the context of social and economic changes reflected through different working conditions. For example, Connell (1998) refers to the phenomenon of 'trans-national business men (and masculinity)', for whom work commitments deprives them of the time and space for fathering and other emotional involvement with the family. My research highlighted that rural-urban labour migration constituted a significant context for the construction of Chinese masculinity associated with fathering and fatherhood. What interests me is whether and how fatherhood has changed in the context of Chinese rural-urban labour migration. However, unlike their fathers' generation, in which men acted as the only master in the family maintaining control of all familial functions, social and economic change associated with rural-urban labour migration has had a major impact on fatherhood among Chinese male peasant workers, who have left their children in their rural homes while they are working in the city. This raises a number of questions. How does this

change, challenge or reconstruct their masculine identities in relation to fatherhood and fathering practices? More importantly, how do such practices of fathering influence the men's subjective understanding of rural-urban labour migration?

5.3:2-2 (1) 'I don't expect my son to look after me.'

For traditional Chinese family culture, a man's responsibility is being a provider for his children and family until he is supported and looked after by his children when he is old. However, such tradition was given new meanings in the narratives of some male peasant workers. Huang Ping (44 years old) was one of the interviewees whose children were not with him while he worked outside his rural home. He was from Jiangxi, where his two children, a son (20 years old) and a daughter (14 years old), lived and went to school. Huang Ping had been working in a chemical factory with his wife for about 10 years. He wished he could return home when he retired. But at the moment, he needed to work hard to provide for his family.

Huang Ping: My father was around to keep an eye on me when I was young because we were working together on the field...(but) now I am away from my children, I cannot keep an eye on them. But they are very obedient that they always listen to me. Sometimes, I was just thinking how good it would have been together with your children like my father did. Both of them are quite grown up now. My son should have got married when I was in his age...I told him to work hard at school. I will support his education as long as he wants to. I am quite satisfied now that he can go to university.

Interviewer: What do you wish to do when you retire?

Huang Ping: I don't have such thinking (about retirement) at the moment. To be honest, I can still work for another few years. I will be happy if my son can get a proper job after university. If he can't...he can't earn much money. He

also needs to marry and buy a house to live. It means I need to help him. I am happy if he can show filial duty to me like I do to my parents. But I don't expect my son to look after me as long as he can look after himself and his wife and children... and my daughter, she also needs me...she is still young, but she will get married in a few years and she also needs money. Nowadays, you can't say marrying a daughter to the other family is like 'throwing the water out'. I don't have time being with them now. Nowadays, everything needs money. I can't just think about the present; I have to think about what they need in the future.

From a Western perspective, it is difficult to capture the fundamental change that this generation of peasant workers are experiencing around fathering, compared to the images of paternal obligation and interpersonal interaction that they have inherited from their own fathers and grandfathers. In turn, the interviews as a methodological technique were not able to capture the mixture of emotions felt by these migrant men that included: a sense of loss, confusion and dislocation in terms of what is the central role in their lives – being a father – as Chinese men. Working in the city for Huang Ping was experienced by him primarily in terms of being able to fulfill his parental duty. This included attempting to combine maintaining his authority at home, while being away working to ensure support for his children's present and future material needs. Like other men in his situation, Huang Ping was actively negotiating his way of being a good father for his children. Traditional Chinese familial ethics, as I explored above, emphasizes the importance of 'filial piety' for children to respect and take care of their parents when they are old. In the male peasant workers' narratives they revealed that they were inverting this traditional arrangement by working hard to ensure that their children were not expected 'to feed them when they are old'. In some cases, the men spoke of turning their absence from the rural home into a positive experience. For example, in their absence they encouraged their sons to act in a more mature way to take

on domestic responsibilities towards their mothers, thus initiating a kind of domestic apprenticeship, in encouraging them at an early stage in preparation to be a man for the family. The men's narratives suggested that the way of fathering in terms of changing social practices may have been transformed, while the meaning of fatherhood in terms of values and obligations remained the same for male peasant workers in contemporary Chinese society. In other words, they continue to live 'a life for others' rather than 'a life of one's own' (Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1996). Thus, the family as central to the gendered habitus of their life in the city continued to have major significance to how they lived their lives, while at the same time being a central resource for the construction of the men's subjectivities.

5.3:2-2 (2) Good father or bad father?

The male peasant workers often raised the issue of the difficulties of being an 'absent father'. They discussed a range of reasons for leaving their children in the rural areas. They were particularly concerned about the misunderstandings and arguments arising from their children being located within the rural home while they worked in the city. Guo Jintian (44 years old) was a married peasant worker who lived and worked with his wife at a chemical factory. They left their 11 years old daughter in their rural home with her aunt. During vacation time, their daughter came to live with them in the city but they were separated during term time, as she attended the school in the local village. When he was talking about his relationship with his daughter, he expressed his dilemma of

what he should do as a father and his disappointment about his daughter's misunderstanding of their living arrangements.

Guo Jintian: 'We (me and my wife) want her to stay with us like the other children in the city. But I don't want my daughter to go to the 'peasant workers' children's school'. She can have better education in the village...So I didn't allow her to come to stay with us...She doesn't understand me...She told her mother on the phone that we didn't want her...I don't know what I should do... People say daughter is close to her father...but I guess she doesn't understand what I do is good for her even though I don't want to (he was shaking his head). I want her to have good education like the other children, but she can't have it if she lives with us.'

Interviewer: Why don't you explain to her?

Guo Jintian: It is not necessary. Children should listen to adults. We do everything for her goodness.

Contemporary material conditions within the modernization project enabled Guo Jintian to provide what he considered as a good education for his daughter. At the same time, such material conditions prevented migrant children from attending local schools in the city as their *hukou* status did not belong to this area. As the head of the family, he had to make what he thought was the right decision for his daughter, while at the same time, such a decision from his daughter's perspective blurred his image as a good father. Many men in my research struggled with the dilemma between emotional attachments and material conditions in terms of fathering, when their children were left in their rural home. In response, the fathers attempted to maintain their emotional connection with their children through telephoning them and bringing them to live with them during holiday time, while materially supporting them by working hard to send money home for the children's daily expenses. The dilemma pointed to wider class questions about

the rural/urban division, education and social welfare in a rapidly changing Chinese society (Harvey, 2005; Wang, 2003; Nee, 1991, 1996).

The meaning of being a father has been challenged within the process of rural-urban labour migration, albeit the authority of fatherhood remains. However, as I observed, fatherhood was of particular importance in the construction of male peasant workers' masculinities for those who have children, whether they were living with them or absent from them. The way of fathering is changing due to current material circumstances. However, being a father still meant that they carried the traditional authority and responsibility in relation to their children. For some of the male peasant workers being away from their children strengthened their emotional attachment as traditional duties of fatherhood needed to be made explicit. Fatherhood for my interviewees was about responsibility in relation to one's children and the rest of the family, though it was played out differently among different men. At the same time, Guo's case also resonates with Hobson and Morgan's (2002:18) acknowledgment of poor and minority men's construction of fatherhood that 'not all men derive benefit from the scripted cultural ideals of masculinities that connect men's economic power to their authority in the family.'

5.4 Classing the Self: Constructing Emotional Migrating Masculinities

Throughout this chapter I have argued that family as a gendered institution is of central importance in exploring gender meanings for these working class rural men. However, the transformation of working conditions from rural to urban China has redefined what

it means to be husbands/partners, fathers and sons. Moving away from the rural family to the city might suggest an opportunity of getting away from traditional family restraints in terms of responsibilities. However, in the process of rural-urban labour migration, these traditional familial gender practices have become an important resource that directs the men's social practices and makes sense of their masculine subjective identity within their lives in the city. The Chinese male peasant workers did not see themselves primarily as individual subjects. Rather, it was through their familial social relations in terms of playing out their roles as fathers, husbands and sons that they made sense of who they were, what they wanted, as well as what they could do within an extended familial social context in post-Mao society. There is evidence in my interviewees' narratives that an understanding of domestic power for the male peasant workers has changed through their experience of migration by recasting their roles and practices as fathers, sons and husbands in their families that used to regulate their behavior and responsibility as a man. As indicated above, there were diverse responses to these new material conditions. However, a major theme in many of the men's narratives was that uniting their families in the city was more important than making money or demonstrating their power within the family.

The meaning of decisions, such as that of Lao Tang, who moved to work and live with his wife and daughter can be interpreted in different ways. A traditional feminist account might suggest that the move serves to naturalize and strengthen men's role in the family, reproducing male domination and superiority. Such an analysis might acknowledge continuities and changes in terms of familial gender norms but that the structured change within the rural family does not fundamentally change men's traditional power

and authoritarianism within a patriarchal system. However, the notion of patriarchy which has been criticized within Chinese society, particularly within rural spaces, by poststructuralist feminists, is seen as being under continuous negotiation as both rural men and women are living a 'new' life as migrants in the city. In many cases that I have illustrated, the modernization ideology and material living conditions have challenged gender practices within the patriarchal system, which located men within a relatively ambiguous position in terms of domestic power relations. They were struggling to maintain a sense of masculinity in relation to their role in the family while experiencing very difficult class-based material conditions in terms of a low economic, social and political status in post-Mao Chinese society. In other words, in order to capture the complexity of the 'new' power relations operating on migrant men and women, we need to address the interconnection of social categories, including class, gender and region (Skeggs, 1997; Reay, 1998).

These complex and unstable conditions produced specific emotions among my participants. Such emotions were based on their developing subjectivities away from their rural homes of origin and their positioning in modern urban space (chapter Four). Traditional familial gender norms were lived out in their daily interactions with their families and have become a central resource in the construction of their migrating masculinities. In their narratives they disclosed a wide range of feelings in terms of 'emotion', 'embarrassment' or 'shame' with reference to diverse concerns, including: feeling they had failed to show paternal responsibility to their children not living with them; fears of failing to demonstrate their filial piety, such as 'passing on the family

name' and failure to 'build a house for family' back in their home villages. Huang Ping illustrates the complex emotional world that the male peasant workers occupied.

Interviewer: How do you feel about working away from your family?

Huang Ping: ...I am happy when sometimes I think my parents are still alive, my son is studying in the university. I feel gratified when I think about these. (He starts crying.) Then I think my son will become better than me. I didn't read many books. He is different, he is educated, he will surely not do labor work like me. Better than me. I feel grateful whenever I think my son has better life than me. (He cries again). He is studying IT. I hope he can have a good job in the future.

Such emotional insights reflected their material subordination in urban spaces, which are of importance in understanding their identity as urban working class migrants. Unlike the new emerging urban new middle class (Tomba, 2004) or new rich (Goodman, 2008) with their consumer-oriented lifestyle, who are reported to have major emotional investment in dogs as pets (see Tomba, 2004), the Chinese male peasant workers were constantly worrying about the welfare of their families within the context of their limited economic capital and class-based cultural responsibilities. At the same time, such emotions (Barbalet, 2002; Sayer, 2005) or emotional capital (Reay, 2004) are historically specific, emerging within the conditions in which the traditional cultural responsibilities of being a man within family have to be played out within the urban modern discourse of progress and development in terms of 'getting rich'. In other words, these working class men must live out their familial masculine subjective identities within current material and discursive conditions that operate against them in an increasingly unequal society.

However, in many cases, as I have illustrated above, the men found it difficult to disclose their emotional feelings to family members as it would have damaged their masculine identities within the family as sons, husbands and fathers. Some of them told me that they had never been emotional in front of other people. The concealment of emotional feelings in their daily interaction with their families may be read as a reflection of the dominant gender ideology that 'real men' are marked by (masculine) rationality rather than (feminine) emotionality (Seidler, 1997). However, there was an intensification of emotional loss that these men as working class migrants away from their home were experiencing, reminiscent of postcolonial research on external migration, settlement and integration. In contrast to the reductive public representation of these men in terms of sexual repression, I found them to be emotionally mature. Within extreme material circumstances, and projected as 'pathological others' in urban spaces, they were remarkably creative in developing strategies to address the multiple emotional needs of their wives/partners, fathers and mothers and their children. In short, they were highly successful in creating an appropriate gendered habitus of emotional capital that made sense of their position in modern space.

Hence, they did not see themselves as victims as they are portrayed in public discourses. They were satisfied with what they had achieved even though they were suffering great pressure both from their rural families and their urban material conditions. In so doing, they believed that they were fulfilling their relational gender roles, which played a vital part in the construction and living out of their masculine identities. Future research might further address the question of the *classed self*, locating emotional well being and

living ‘a life for others’ within multiple categories of social inequality and cultural difference (Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1996; Reay, 1998).

5.5 Conclusion: Family Practices and Migrating Masculine Identities

Chinese male peasant workers constructed their masculine subjective identities through their gendered practices in relation to their families. Traditional familial gender practices have been challenged and dislocated in male peasant workers’ lives due to the absence from their families. However, in their narratives they revealed that connections with their rural families are of central importance in constructing their masculine identities. This chapter has explored a dynamic picture of gendered practices among Chinese male peasant workers and their families. It offers a critical understanding of gender norms within the men’s rural families through the investigation of changing and diverse gendered practices in the process of rural-urban labour migration. More importantly, these gendered practices in relation to traditional relational roles as sons, fathers and partners/husbands, have become important resources in the construction of their masculine identity as male peasant workers through the interpretation of the negotiation of their gendered practices. This resonates with Morgan’s (1996) notion of ‘family practices’ that convey an active ordinary everyday life with culturally and historically embedded regularity as well a sense of fluidity within meaningful and multiple ways. In addition, Skeggs (2004b: 22) refers to Bourdieu’s notion of the function of the family as capital where ‘normalcy and the ability to constitute oneself as the universal’ operates. As she continues, ‘this enables normalcy to be both a kind of capital within the field of

the family and a form of symbolic capital that represents accumulated privilege in other fields' (ibid.). As my research reveals, there is a continuity of family related gender practices in the field of the urban workplace, where male peasant workers are located, which I investigate in Chapter Six.

Chapter Six

Masculine Identities and the Urban Workplace

6.1 Masculinity and Identity Formation of Urban Working Class

6.2 Gendered Work for Rural Men: From the Rural to the Urban

6.2:1 Privileged gendered work for men in rural China

6.2:2 Relocation of work in modern space

6.2:2-1 *Being outside: migration as constituting masculine identity*

6.2:2-2 *Gendering migrant work and the construction of 'masculine' work*

6.2:2-2 (1) Social contacts and the formation of gendered and classed labour

6.2:2-2 (2) Symbolism and 'prestige-related' gendered work

6.3 Social Relations and Masculine Subjective Identities within the Urban Workplace

6.3:1 The change of 'gendered' work and the gendering of work

6.3:2 The construction of non-kin familial social relations at work

6.3:2-1 *Work mates as families*

6.3:2-2 *'Class consciousness' and/or 'father-son' relationship at work*

6.3:2-3 *Critical understanding of the new 'familial' men at work*

6.4 Conclusion

6.1 Masculinity and Identity Formation of Urban Working Class

As I have investigated in Chapter Five, relational gender practices that the male peasant workers carried out as fathers, sons and partners/husbands were of particular importance in constituting their masculine subjective identities in urban spaces in terms of the motivation and the purpose of migration. Such migrant working class masculine identities were (re)worked to make sense of their position, when their familial masculinities were dislocated, as part of the transformation of material conditions in post-Mao modernization and geographical relocation. One of the key features of rural-urban migration is the transformation of work from an agricultural sector in a rural setting to a non-agricultural sector in the city. This chapter focuses on male peasant workers' experience of working in urban spaces, as another major constitutive element in the formation of their identity. Given the highly negative and reductive public portrayal of these men that I explored in Chapter Four as a result of the dominant discourse of modernization, the chapter responds by concentrating on the men's individual and collective self-representations of life in the city.

Throughout the research, gender is conceptualized as an analytical term to understand social relations within contextually-based multiple masculinities and femininities (Connell, 1987, 1995; Donaldson, 1993; Bradley, 1996; Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003, 2007), which resonates with the male peasant workers' experience in relation to their family. They constructed their relational gender identities in different social contexts to make sense of their dislocated masculine subjective identities. Rural-urban labour migration in China, as outlined in the last chapter, has challenged and redefined the meaning of gender relations within the family with 'new' complex gendered domestic practices emerging. More

generally, this chapter aims to understand how rural men accommodated themselves within urban workplaces. More specifically, it critically examines the strategies they deploy within female-concentrated, non-conventional male occupations.

Public work is commonly understood as a meaningful social practice that has played an important part in constructing and maintaining men's masculinity in rural China. This resonates with Morgan's (1992) understanding of work as an integral element in men's lives in shaping their masculinities. Western literature has produced a range of accounts of men working and the dynamics of masculinities within the workplace (Morgan 1992; Alvesson, 1998; Jackson, 2001; Lupton, 2000; McDowell, 2003; Simpson, 2004; Nixon, 2009, Batnitzky et al., 2009). Within these texts, masculinity is culturally constructed within social relations among individuals within particular historically based contexts, such as the family and the workplace. Hence, throughout the chapter we need to remember that I am using western concepts and theories within a non-western context. More specifically, I am building on contemporary feminist Chinese scholarship that has adopted such concepts as femininity and masculinity within contemporary Chinese society, marked by rapid economic and social change associated with global modernity (Dirlik, 2003, 2004).

6.2 Gendered Work for Rural Men: From the Rural to the Urban

A key argument of western feminist and pro-feminist research has been to emphasize the social construction of gender with the workplace seen as of central importance in producing an understanding of masculinity and femininity (Acker, 1990; Connell, 1987, 1998). For Connell (1998:5) masculinities 'do not exist prior to social interaction, but come

into existence as people act.’ More specifically, research on gender and the workplace, for example, Collinson and Hearn (1994), argue that it is particularly important to have a critical understanding of men and masculinities within the workplace as an understanding of them often remains hidden and taken for granted. They (Collinson and Hearn, 1994:3) maintain that: ‘men in organizations often seem preoccupied with the creation and maintenance of various masculine identities and with the expression of gendered power and status in the workplace’.

6.2:1 Privileged gendered work for men in rural China

As I stated in the previous chapter, the gender division of work in rural China is based on the household. Work is allocated within highly demarcated categories associated with public and private domains. Men occupy the public domain, while women ‘take care’ of the private domestic domain. This oppositional logic is marked by traditional gender norms in China: ‘men rule outside, women rule inside’ (Harrell 2000; Jacka, 1997) that shapes the gendered habitus of everyday life. Given this patriarchal familial structure, gendered work for rural men and women tends to be culturally shaped by a series of dichotomies ‘inside/outside’, ‘light/heavy’ and other binary forms (Jacka, 1997:26). More importantly, men’s work is also seen as highly skilled in contrast to women’s work; an ideal female position within Confucianism is that ‘for a woman to be without ability is a virtue’ (Judd, 1996:1). Traditionally women have been restricted to domestic spaces, carrying out domestic related work, such as housekeeping and sewing. Highly segregated images of gender identity formation in relation to work have been produced out of the

meanings of such dichotomies. Such a gendered division of work within the Chinese context resonates with the western notion of gender symbolism (Morgan, 1992), which serves to establish the value of gendered work and acts as the measurement of masculinity for rural men. Within the Maoist period with the promotion of gender equality, the communist Chinese government advocated gender erasure in terms of work, as I explored in Chapter Four, in terms of the masculinisation of women (section 4.2:1-1). For example, gender representation of peasants during that period encouraged women's participation in agricultural work with such slogans as: 'Women hold up half of the sky' and 'Things men can do, women also can do' (Honig, 2000). However, according to Jacka (1997:190), a traditional gender occupational pattern in terms of 'men rule outside, women rule inside' materially and symbolically remained in place during that era.

More importantly, such a closed gender division of work is associated with traditional familial gender norms, even after post-Mao economic reform when the Chinese government shifted its rural policy from a 'collective based' to a 'family-based contract responsibility system' or 'household responsibility system' (see Brandt et al., 2002). Within such family oriented agricultural production activities, the gender division of work, on the one hand, subordinated women's social position; while on the other hand, it maintained a traditional male hegemonic and authoritarian masculine identity. For example, Jacka (1997) uses the following example to illustrate the unequal power relations between men and women in agricultural work. As she notes,

'if a woman went near a well that was being dug, no water, or only bad water, would be found, and if a menstruating women walked through a paddy field she would cause the rice shoots to shrivel' (Jacka,1997:23)

Men's hegemonic position within rural work has been maintained through these traditional gender ideologies and practices, generally in relation to outdoor heavier work. Both patriarchal based gendered work and the Confucian gender hierarchy have secured rural men's masculinity within village life that have been criticized by feminists in terms of their power to subordinate women. More importantly, to critically understand the hegemonic masculine position of men within agricultural work, it is necessary to address the specific inter-relations of a traditional familial gender order, in which a father has power over his son, an older brother over a younger brother, etc. In other words, there is a need to understand the dynamic of power relations among men in such family oriented agricultural work, marked by generation and age differences that are based on traditional Confucian ethics.

6.2:2 Relocation of work in modern space

In most cases, men's participation in urban work has been seen as an important practice that is compatible with traditional male gender roles, with men pursuing the role of 'bread winner' and demonstrating the ideology of men's work as taking place 'outside' the home. However, with the increasing number of out-migrating family members and especially with the increasing number of female peasant workers from the rural areas, the traditional gendered labour division has been challenged. The dominant cultural meanings of masculinity and femininity associated with occupations have also been changing, with empirical studies suggesting the 'feminization of agriculture' in rural China (Gao, 1994; Zuo, 2004; Song and Zhang, 2004), as out-migrating men leave women to do agricultural

work, alongside the increasing number of female peasant workers entering the urban labour force¹.

6.2:2-1 Being outside: migration as constituting masculine identity

Rural-urban migration has had a specific impact on reconstituting work-based masculinities. On the one hand, migration has provided opportunities for male peasant workers to enact their traditional gender roles by earning ‘big money’ that serves to demonstrate their masculinity as the ‘breadwinner’ providing material support to the family (Savage, 2005). On the other hand, it has also provided space for them to (re)construct their masculinities in order to accommodate themselves to the ‘new’ urban locations within which the symbols of ‘money’ and ‘knowledge’ have generated new signs of masculinity within a specific historical context of modernization. Asking my interviewees about the difference between working in the field at home and working in the city, Huang Ping (44 years old), who worked in a chemistry factory suggested that:

Interviewer: What do you think the difference is working here in the factory and working at home on the farm?

Huang Ping: Of course different. Besides the income, the pressure of working on the farm is much higher than working in the factory. If the weather and everything is fine, then it is ok but it would have been bad if some natural disaster happened. It is more secure working outside. You have a family to feed. Now children need money to go to university.

¹ According to the 1990 China Population Census, migrant women account for 46% of intraprovincial migrants and 42% of interprovincial migrants in China. The most recent data from the 2000 Chinese census showed that 52% of migrants are women. Source: Population Census Office (2002) *Tabulation on the 2000 Census of the People's Republic of China*. Beijing: China Statistics Press.

There is a certain continuity in this response with that of their fathers' generation of implementing the central male obligation towards protecting the family. Although the men often referred to the negative aspects of their working lives, they were also grateful for the sustained and potential increased financial security of urban work. However, for many male peasant workers, especially for a younger generation, the historical specificity of their self representations of their current occupational lives included deep investments in modern work outside their hometown. These investments included self-development, as advocated by the Chinese modernization project in terms of better wages and opportunities in the city. Ah Fu and Zhu Yanhui recalled their rationale for moving out from rural areas to work in the city:

Ah Fu (19 years old): ...There is no opportunity working at home...everyone is leaving to work in the south...there is no future and it is useless staying at home...

...

Zhu Yanhui (23 years old): I just didn't want to stay at home. It is not good to stay at home for good. All the young people in the hometown go to work outside. There are just old people and children around.

Interviewer: What happens to you if you don't work outside?

Zhu Yanhui: I don't know...staying at home perhaps. But it is too boring staying at home alone since all your friends have gone out to work. Young people need to go out to 'jian shi mian' (see the world).

Many of the young male peasant workers I interviewed conveyed an intense desire for the social world outside their local villages. In this imaginary shift from the local to the global, the gendered notion of the outside appeared to be conceptually expanded (Marchand and Runyan, 2000). There was an active reworking of the traditional gender ideology of men's work practices being located outside in the public space. For a younger generation, such as Ah Fu and Zhu Yanhui, this expansion of the notion of the outside from the private world

of the home and now the village to the public world of the city served to recalibrate the cultural hierarchy of masculinities. For example, at this time, in their transition to adulthood, as Zhu Yanhui claimed, there appeared to be only old people and children left behind in the village. This can be read in terms of the projection of an ascribed low status masculinity to those young men who stay in the village, who are represented as ‘useless’ and having ‘no future’ that could not be associated with adult men. Importantly, it had become a trend for rural youth, such as Ah Fu and Zhu Yanhui, to move to the city to look for work as soon as they could, immediately after completing middle school. Some of them also expressed that it was returned peasant workers that opened up their imagination and desire for the outside world. Wang Hai (32 years old) spoke about how he felt when he saw returned workers,

‘My friends were all heading out to look for work in the South. We thought there must be a lot of opportunities to make big money in Guangdong. Some people send money back home and started to build a house for their family. Our eyes were red (We were very jealous.) when we saw our neighbour had a big house. I thought I couldn’t stay at home for life. I had to explore the outside world for a career and earn big money for my family.’

However, most of these men due to their low educational and occupational qualifications could not access the high status urban jobs that they desired. As diverse literatures on emigrants and internal migrants have testified across different societies, the social imaginary operates as a major motivation that impels men and women to leave their homelands in search of a better life (Boehm, 2004; Cohen 2006). However, as this generation of Chinese male peasant workers were discovering the reality for most of them was highly dislocated lives in which they had to re-invent new identities of survival in the city.

6.2:2-2 Gendered migrant work and the construction of 'masculine' work

Until recently, within public narratives work was discursively represented within highly rigid gendered codes. For example, ascribed jobs for women included: domestic cleaning, taking care of people and labour-intensive factory work. Fan (2004:288-89) points out how peasant workers are positioned within highly bounded gender classifications. She notes that: 'factory work targets young, single migrant women because they are constructed to be detailed, able to handle delicate work, and easy to control, while migrant men are channeled into heavy work such as construction'. However, such dominant categorizations of gendered work do not fully constrain the potential fluidity of more diverse meanings of masculinity and femininity, which I will address later in the chapter. Western literature on gender and the workplace in industrial societies suggests that socially constructed notions of gendered labour and gender segregation in the labour market is of importance in shaping western capitalist economies in relation to social class (McDowell, 1999). For example, the symbolic meanings of men's involvement in physical demanding work maintain the dominant notion of masculine qualities within work, which are highlighted in Willis' (2000 [1977]) study of the formation of working class men:

'Manual labour is suffused with masculine qualities ... The toughness and awkwardness of physical work and effort—for itself and in the division of labour and for its strictly capitalist logic quite without intrinsic heroism and grandeur—takes on masculine lights and depths and assumes a significance beyond itself. Whatever the specific problems, so to speak, of the difficult task they are always essentially masculine problems. It takes masculine capacities to deal with them ... The brutality of the working situation is partially re-interpreted into a heroic exercise of manly confrontation with *the task*. Difficult, uncomfortable or dangerous conditions are seen, not for themselves, but for their appropriateness to a masculine readiness and hardiness.' (Willis, 2000: 150)

Willis (2000[1977]) highlights that it is not just masculine qualities that are expressed through working-class men's jobs, but also that such qualities secure gender power and their privileged position in carrying out such heroic exercises.

Occupational choice and gender practice is a central site for the construction of masculine identity (Morgan, 1992). In western literature the primary theoretical position of 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) within the modern workplace critically engages with patriarchal gender norms and men's hegemonic position in terms of the different types of work to which women and men are allocated with accompanying forms of power. As Kelan (2010: 177) argues in her critical exploration of doing and undoing gender in organizations:

'Studies of doing gender in organizations tend to focus on how gender differentiation, hierarchy and asymmetry are maintained. In this way, the focus has generally been on how the gender binary is maintained in the realm of work' (Kelan, 2010:177).

Such an approach to examining gender in organizations has been criticized for not addressing the potential dynamic fluidity in actual gender practices within different workplaces (Martin, 2001). When I began to interview the male peasant workers, the logic of such accounts that assume a simple patriarchal work structure did not make sense of the men's lives. More specifically, an assumed simple oppositional logic of male domination and female subordination within the workplace was not able to capture the complexity of the male peasant workers' lives, who often worked in non-traditional, female dominated occupations. Methodologically, at this early stage of the research I found that critical empirical data collection within a Chinese context could be used to interrogate established western epistemologies of gender oppression.

6.2:2-2 (1) Social contacts and the formation of gendered and classed labour

In Chapter Two, I referred to the productive deployment of adapting new feminist accounts, working within a British Cultural Studies tradition, that address the intersectionality of categories, including gender, class and ethnicity, enabling us to examine male peasant workers' cultural formation, identity and subjectivity (Skeggs, 1997; Reay, 1998). In order to critically understand the complexity of the interconnecting gender and class meanings of migrant jobs for male peasant workers, it is important to consider the notion of capital as a resource in the formation of their labour. Within current dominant discourses of neo-liberal modernization with accompanying connotations of development and progress, the men's lack of social, cultural and economic capitals served to exclude them from access to high-status jobs in the modern urban workplace (Bourdieu, 1989). This had a specific impact on the complex dynamics of gendered-classed work in the context of the men's cultural habitus (or relational self). The formation of gendered-classed jobs and the occupational division of labour among peasant workers (Fan, 2004) needs to be critically understood as the result of the social contacts they had formed. In other words, their social capital was of importance in the formation of the 'gendering' of their classed occupations. For example, male peasants working in the construction sector who migrated at an earlier period provided contacts for job opportunities (social capital) for later male peasant workers.

*'I was working on a building site when I first went out of my hometown. At that time, **most of my laoxiang** (native-place fellows) were working on building sites. So we introduce to each other if we got any job information.'* (Lao Tang, 48 years old) (my emphasis)

*'I didn't know what I should do at the beginning. I don't have any qualifications... I know nothing about working outside. I used to work on a building site. **My friend** introduced me to it. Those people who worked outside the hometown before us told us wherever they need people to work...I knew nothing about the outside. So I just went out to work on a building site together with **my other laoxiang.**' (Xiao Zhang, 30 years old) (my emphasis)*

*'When you have been working outside for a while, **people from your hometown** are expecting you to introduce a job for them....' (Wang Hai, 32 years old)(my emphasis)*

Fan (2003) maintains that 'migrants are expected to be directed to specific jobs rather than having open access to the entire array of jobs' (Fan, 2003:27). This pattern is partly shaped by access to social contacts, most importantly through their family network, as well as other external factors such as economic status and educational qualifications rather than just their personal will. For example, some of the ex-construction workers I interviewed informed me that their experience of finding work in the construction sector resulted from having a contact with fellow villagers, who informed them of the job vacancy. For them, choice of jobs was not based on personal preferences but rather positively resulted from such social contacts and more negatively as working class men as a result of their lack of qualifications which prevented them from access to higher skilled occupations.

Within western literature on gender and work, there tends to be a predictable gendered list of occupations that are rigidly classified as women's and men's jobs in industrial societies. More recently, post-structuralist-based studies of the workplace have suggested a shift from a structurally fixed meaning of gendered work to a more fluid and flexible notion. Such a notion of gendered work has been represented by recent studies of new men and men's involvement in female concentrated work (see Lupton, 2000; Simpson, 2004; Nixon, 2009). For the Chinese male peasant workers a non-traditional gendered classificatory system was

in place. Rather than seeking to work in the construction sector as a demonstration of involvement in a working class masculine practice, for the male peasant workers moving outside of the rural area to work in the city to provide a better life for their families constituted a new way of being a man, who fulfilled his central domestic obligations. Within this context rather than the job itself being seen as intrinsically associated with masculinity, as for the first generation of male peasant workers located within the construction sector, gender meanings for the men I interviewed were located within the male bonding attached to social contacts and looking after their *Laoxiang*² (native-place fellows) that served to demonstrate their working class masculine identity.

The men's narratives make clear the need to see beyond dominant government, media and academic representations of men and gender identity formation within the workplace that tend to over-emphasize a structuralist-based approach, focusing upon the social positioning of male peasant workers within a fixed gender system. This approach underplays the question of men's subjectivity and agency (Knights, 1990). The male peasant workers' narratives provide a more complex picture of their own individual and collective agency in re-constructing their working class masculine identity. However, as they illustrate in these self-representations, this is not simply informed by a 'do-it-yourself biography', as suggested by western late modernity theorists (Giddens, 1991, Beck, 1992, 1994). Rather, it is within the historically specific material conditions of the current Chinese modernization project that underlies their internal migration, enabling them to operationalise social contacts between their future employer and their family, wider kin and

² *Laoxiang* or native-place fellows, according to Ma and Xiang (1998:560), are important to the social network of migrant workers. They normally share common experience, identical home dialect and a similar sense of fate that 'engender an intimate camaraderie that binds them together'.

local people from their villages. In so doing, they extend the central traditional gendered obligation of men to provide for one's family.

This chapter endorses McDowell's (1997:25) understanding of 'women workers', in which she refers to Scott's (1988:47) argument for the need to address the historical formation of women workers:

'If we write the history of women's work by gathering data that describe the activities, needs, interests, and culture of 'women workers', we leave in place the naturalised contrast and reify a fixed categorical difference between men and women. We start the story, in other words, too late, by uncritically accepting a gendered category (the 'woman worker') that itself needs investigation because its meaning is relative to its history.'

Equally, there is a need to understand the male peasant workers' gendered and classed meanings as part of their habitus relative to their history. In so doing, the thesis seeks to denaturalize the gendered assumptions of the Chinese modernization project that has associated them with heavy labour-demanding jobs, such as building, mining and factory work. These officially projected images of working class men are also spatially located, with heavy industrial jobs tending to be located within the north of China. My research was carried out in the south of China, where more light industry tends to be located. Within this location, the male peasant workers' self-representations of their working lives provide alternative accounts that emphasize their active making of masculine working class occupationally-based identities, thus serving to challenge existing work in this field of inquiry.

6.2:2-2 (2) Symbolism and ‘prestige-related’ gendered work

In relation to gender and the workplace, Lupton and Barclay (1997: 2) maintain that men ‘are encouraged to construct their self-identities as masculine subjects through their work role’. Alongside the modern gendering process within urban workplaces, issues of stratification have played an important role in understanding the meaning of urban work in China. Liang and Chen (2004:424) have identified a range of elements that impact upon the stratification of male peasant workers’ lives. An important element is the urban ‘hukou’, which acts as a prerequisite for specific occupations and limits opportunities for peasant workers. Li (2004a) has produced a ranking of occupational prestige in China, and used statistics to show that within a hundred occupations, most of those listed at the bottom were associated with peasant workers (see Table 6.2a):

Table 6.2a Ranking of Occupational Prestige³

Ranking	Occupation	Prestige Index	Ranking	Occupation	Prestige Index
83	Miner	47.34	95	Logistics Worker	41.22
86	Construction Worker	46.88	96	Maid/Household Cleaner	38.80
88	Store Shop Owner	46.03	97	Chief-Labour Contractor	37.63
92	Self-employed Peasant in Town	42.21	98	Bin Recycle Workers/Collector	36.61
93	Unit Security Guard	42.20	99	Tri-cycle Rider	36.51
94	Immigrant Peasant Worker	41.71	100	Receptionist	36.37

His research also shows that there is no substantial gender difference in the population who are migrating, with 51.53% men and 48.47% women in a total number of over 1.242 billion

³ Source: Li, Q. (2004a) *Urban Migrant Workers and Social Stratification* (Chinese). Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press.

people in his survey⁴. Due to the location of my fieldwork, many of my participants were involved within the service industry and light industrial work rather than construction and other heavy industry sectors. Issues of social stratification or more specifically occupational prestige are of importance in the (re)construction of masculine identity, which in western literature is particularly associated with social class and the production of diverse class-based masculinities (Connell, 1991; Pyke, 1996).

Early work in the western literature on men and the workplace privileged class as a central category of explanation (Tolson, 1977). This was challenged by new social movement theory, including feminism and anti-racism, which was theoretically important in developing a vocabulary that identified gender and ethnicity as of equal importance to class in understanding the institution of the workplace (Bradley and Healy, 2008). In turn, more recently post-structuralist analysis has criticized new social movement theory for producing an additive model of oppression, in which each category makes claims about being ‘the most oppressed’ (Skeggs, 1997, 2004). In response, post-structuralist theorists have suggested the need to address the complex inter-sectionality of multiple categories and an accompanying complex view of power, in terms of how these social categories are played out in specific spatial and temporal contexts.

This theoretical framework is productive when exploring the working lives of Chinese male peasant workers. The men’s narratives provide evidence of their mis-representation in dominant government, media and academic representations. Of specific significance in understanding the social positioning of the men is the interplay between gender, class and

⁴ Ibid. pp.8.

urban/rural divisions. Existing work on gender and migration has been carried out by feminist scholars (Pun, 2005; Yan, 2008). This work has been important in identifying the social stratification and accompanying exploitation of female peasant workers. However, an unintended effect of deploying a framework of patriarchy is that male peasant workers are assumed to have high gendered status as part of the patriarchal privilege that is accrued to all men. I argue that, within the context of the workplace, the male peasant workers' lives cannot simply be read in terms of a high status stratification position. Their gender identities are cross-cut with a social class and a rural regional status. Current economic conditions have helped re-define understandings of gendered occupations, as Fan (2003, 2004) maintains. Rural men's urban jobs and attendant male subjectivities are generally subordinated within a post-Mao China with its dominant discourse of modernization advocating development and progress. One of my interviewees, Pan Peifeng, illustrates the complexity of the men's marginalized social status, which is marked by a certain ambiguity within official meanings attached to peasant workers

Pan Peifeng (34 years old) is a security guard working in a local residential area. When I saw him both on and off duty, he always wore his security uniform. He told me that it was compulsory to wear it while at work but he chose to wear it while off duty. He described a range of reasons for this, including not having many clothes with him and that it gave him a sense of responsibility.

Pan Peifeng: I like wearing the security uniform. It is my job. I feel a responsibility upon me, to ensure the safety of the people in this building and taking notes of who comes in and goes out...

Western literature has highlighted the importance of the uniform in the formation of a worker's identity (see Du Gay, 1996; Morgan, 1992) that is compatible with Pan's account.

Pan was very proud of wearing his uniform and was aware that it connoted a public respectable masculine status. However, he also revealed that his uniform carried other meanings due to the urban/rural dichotomy in contemporary China, with the former operating to dominate the latter. In relation to his urban encounters, he felt that his masculine status was subordinated within the hierarchy of this rural/urban dichotomy.

Pan Peifeng: People who live in this building are nice to you...but not all the people treat us well. Sometimes they shout at me: 'Bao'an (security guard), open the gate!' like shouting at a servant...I have to take their car registers (people from outside) and the room number they visit. Sometimes they just ignore you and drive in...if you stop them they will show very bad manners...But I still trace them in the garden, asking them to pay the parking...

The uniform for Pan Peifeng had a range of gender meanings. The uniform as a signifier of a job in security provided him, in gender terms, with a sense of responsibility that enabled him to symbolically project a positive masculine status. At the same time, in class terms, his uniform was associated with a low status job with relatively little prestige. There were further ambiguities attached to his wearing of the uniform. On the one hand, for some people he gained respect as someone in a security job that was protecting them and their property. On the other hand, with the restratification of jobs as part of the modernization project, security jobs were reclassified as being associated with rural peasant workers, who were treated with extreme disrespect. Pan Peifeng's account was echoed in number of the peasant workers' narratives, serving to illustrate that their masculine status within public spaces were temporary, fragile, fragmented and relational.

6.3 Social Relations and Masculine Subjective Identities within the Urban Workplace

Alongside seeing the urban workplace as a gendered organization (Acker, 1990), where Chinese male peasant workers are socially positioned, examined above, I also wish to explore how male peasant workers are gendering the workplace and the emergence of new gender meanings in terms of masculine identity formation. Within the historical context of modernization, working in the city to make money to support their families was the key motivation for Chinese male peasant workers to carry out their obligation as ‘the man of the family’, which fulfils the demands of tradition. At the same time, they report a strong sense of dislocation as male subjects in the move from their rural villages, manifest in the highly subordinated position they occupy in terms of the social hierarchy of workplace. The tensions for them as male subjects between being ‘man of the home’, their occupational experience and the public designated images of migrating masculinities created a space for them to reflect on and reconstruct their gendered positions. In western literature, theorists have suggested the need to make a conceptual shift from a singular notion of masculinity to a notion of multiple masculinities, in order to capture the contextual complexity of how men live their lives within conditions of late modernity (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007). A notion of multiple migrating masculinities is useful in exploring the constitution of masculine subjective identities within the urban space of the modern workplace.

As outlined in Chapter Four, the dominant public representation of male peasant workers associated them with working within heavy industrial occupations. In contrast the men in my study worked in small manufacturing factories and family businesses, such as electronics, toy and chemistry factories, most of which are self-owned by local

entrepreneurs. More importantly, some male peasant workers were self-employed, working with their families in some small businesses, including being domestic cleaners, market merchants or tri-cycle riders. This chapter particularly focuses on how the men accommodated themselves within such workplaces and the impact on their masculine identity formation within female concentrated occupations, for example, as domestic cleaners and electronic and toy factory workers. This enables alternative accounts of images to those of the stereotypical projected images of male peasant workers' 'tough masculinities' as construction workers and miners. Given the material conditions of these men's working lives, including the location of the research and the type of occupations with which they were involved, conventional ideas on the formation of masculinity and its dominant position within the workplace needs to be rethought (Collinson, 1988; Bradley 1993).

6.3:1 The change of 'gendered' work and the gendering of work

As I have argued above the male peasant workers' masculinities in the workplace, generated within a shifting gendered division of labour were not pre-given or stable but rather historically, socially and culturally constructed. On the one hand, as a result of the process of working in urban settings, they were impelled to actively (re)construct their masculinities through new occupational practices. However, on the other hand, they were constrained in defining their masculine identities through their gendered social positioning, associated with the assumptions of what constituted masculine work. As indicated above, male peasant workers in southern China, where my research was located tended to work in

light manufacturing factories or with their families as household cleaners or other self-employed occupations. A major reason for this was their low educational and occupational qualifications that made it hard for them to access modern skilled occupations (which have significant symbolic meaning for modern Chinese masculinities). However, a key argument here is that whatever kind of job they carried out, they were actively gendering their occupations through their social practices. This had specific implications within an area such as Shantou, with its predominance of service and light manufacturing industries, where for peasant workers, gender boundaries were less clear than in the other places. More specifically, the men were working in occupations traditionally associated with female peasant workers in the modern stereotypical gender ideology of the workplace currently circulating within Chinese society.

In several places of this thesis I have suggested the concept of feminization operating within a discourse of modernization, as an element of the dislocation of male peasant workers' masculinity in the process of moving from rural to the urban areas. Western theorists, such as McDowell (1991), develop the concept of feminization from a simple conceptualization of an increasing number of women's participation within the labour market, (resonant with rural women's increasing participation within agriculture and women's participation in rural-urban labour migration), to an expanding concept which captures the interplay between new ways of working, particularly with the increase in service sector work. In the last chapter, I indicated that some male peasant workers worked as household cleaners with their wives as a result of moving to unite the family or were working in light manufacturing factories, where the majority of labourers were female. Western empirical research on men working in traditional feminine occupations (Simpson,

2004; Lupton, 2000) has found evidence that men use different strategies to accommodate themselves in these jobs. For Whitehead (2002), ‘the identity work of the masculine subject requires them to learn, assimilate and perform that which is fundamentally illusory, but which ultimately rests on the approving disapproving gaze of the Other.’ (Whitehead, 2002: 219).

Accompanying the economic development during the last 30 years, there is an increasing number of businesses within the service industry in urban China, alongside increasing job opportunities in the service sector (Hale and Hale, 2003) for people such as peasant workers who have few educational credentials. Lao Tang was part of the increasing number of men working in the service sector, within which traditional gender roles in terms of practices in relation to familial work has become an important resource for him to accommodate himself within his predominantly ‘female’ job. He was a 48 years-old man from the Sichuan Province, working as a male household cleaner in the city with his wife and other relatives. As noted earlier, he gave up his job in a rural village to move to live with his family. Connell (1995; 2000) has argued that different forms of work, marked as manual and cerebral, have been of key significance in differentiating between men, thus producing a hierarchical classification of multiple masculinities. I found similar accounts of job related gender hierarchy in my data collection. Within this context, Lao Tang found his own way to accommodate himself within a predominantly ‘female’ job after working in the construction industry by appealing to assumed natural masculine attributes.

Lao Tang: It is relatively easier for women to find a household cleaning job. Men need to work in the house for a few times before they hire you...I knew they came into the room to look at what I was doing regularly in case I was stealing something... People hire you because they can ask you to climb high up to clean

the windows. It is too dangerous for women to do it. People don't worry about you if you are a man. Besides, they ask you to move some heavy stuff.

Interviewer: Are the wages the same between men and women?

Lao Tang: The same, it depends on the size of the house.

Interviewer: Do you mind people seeing your job as a women's job?

Lao Tang: Both men and women can do it. Here, if your wife is a household cleaner, the husband is as well. And man is stronger than woman...It is difficult to get a job now. It is not bad that you can earn money to 'feed' the family.

Bradley (1993) argues that it might be easier for women to work in traditional male dominated jobs than men in women's jobs. The predominant gender division of labour that has developed within the modernization process is accompanied by a relative higher percentage of women than men working in the service sector, with particular implications for male peasant workers. My empirical work, as indicated above, suggests that male peasants working in non-conventional men's jobs redefined modern 'feminine' work as 'masculine' work that required physical demanding work. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) suggest that gender is a background identity that functions as the core structure of cultural beliefs that are not easy to erode, although changing socioeconomic conditions and personal and collective resistance can gradually modify the beliefs as indicated by these working class men in my research.

Located within the dominant modernization discourse of development and progress, for the male peasant workers positioned as 'modernization losers', cultural traditions in terms of familial related gender practices have become a key resource for them to survive in their urban job. As Seidler (1997:201) suggests: 'history leaves a moral legacy and the ways we grow up to inherit masculinities as men reflect the powers men have traditionally exercised in families'. Such a moral legacy in terms of gender norms is part of our cultural formed

unconsciousness that directs our daily actions before we have sufficient capital for pursuing our reflexive consciousness. For example, Lao Tang, working with his family brought the gendered role operating within his rural home to the urban workplace. Rural men in female centred occupations neither acted in a privileged way towards women nor placed themselves in a disadvantaged position to other men in conventional male-centred occupations (Lupton, 2000). They engendered the 'feminine' job through practicing their relational gender role. Their lack of occupational skills and qualifications and the highly competitive labour market compelled them to be 'masculine' in relation to their female partner within their 'non-masculine' jobs, in order that the visibility of their masculine practices would gradually change the perception of the modern gendered job in the urban setting. Working as a domestic cleaner, for example, according to Lao Tang, has now become a family business rather than a single sex occupation, where men and women have their relationally gender defined duties. For example, as he claimed: *'you can climb high up to clean the windows. It is too dangerous for women to do it'*. Such evidence of men's involvement with labour demanding and dangerous tasks can also be found in electronic and toy factories, as local employers have gendered expectations of male workers involvement in 'heavy tasks', such as loading and unloading material. For example, when I was in a local electronic factory, sometimes the leader of the assembling line would call out some male workers to carry out heavy tasks, such as loading materials onto lorries for distribution. Yang Erjie (42 years old, female, workshop leader) made the following observation about some of the male workers in her workshop:

'They all want to be the first to do the heavy work once they are needed. Such as Song Shan and Xiao Wu are most vigorous. Every time we need someone to do

some other work such as loading the material, they are always the first.’ (at Hung Wu electronic factory 22nd July 2007)

In a later interview with Song Shan, a 20 years old male worker, in an electronic factory, he commented:

Interviewer: Yang Erjie told me you are always the first one to do help loading the material.

Song Shan (20 years old): I am not the only one. We all try to have good behaviour and impression in front of her... Honestly it is nothing. It was much more tiring to help my father move vegetables to sell in the market. I needed to ride a trolley full of vegetables to the market every morning. It is nothing to move stuff.

Lao Tang and Song Shan spoke of their awareness of their subordinated social position within their urban gendered workplace due to the connotation of their social inferiority given the nature of the work in post-Mao modern society. At the same time, they also suggested the importance of their traditional familial gendered practices as the strategies that they constantly deployed in their work that to some extent served to balance the inferiority of working with women and the superiority of being a man in urban female concentrated occupations, from which they make sense of their position within the workplace. Their gender practices in terms of carrying out tasks associated with a man's role within rural agricultural work within the context of an urban female concentrated occupation resonates with Batnitzky et al's (2009) research on migrant men in a London female concentrated workplace. They use the notion of the men's 'flexible strategic masculinities' in order to fulfill their economic expectations, albeit their masculine practices from their country of origin have been challenged due to their limited access to those jobs that can maintain their masculine identities. Meanwhile, as Osella and Osella (2000:128) argue: 'what helps male migration particularly relevant to masculinity is an

enhanced relationship with money, a detachable form of masculine potency and means of exerting agency at a distance'. Such an argument is particularly relevant to the Chinese male peasant workers, especially located within the current dominant discourse of progress projected by the government modernization project. They constructed their masculine identity by perceiving themselves as subjects who have been enabled to pursue traditional male responsibilities in relation to their rural families. The men's gendering of urban jobs can be understood in terms of their 'strategic' action to accommodate themselves within the urban workplace. At the same time, their enhanced relationship with money in this context results from their marginalized working class status, which is marked by a lack of urban social capital. Most significantly, for these working class men, as Lao Tang indicates above, even though they were working as domestic cleaners, they were still content that they were earning money to feed their families, through which their masculine identities were maintained. In other words, to be able to work outside rural areas and support their families back home was the key element in the formation of their masculine identity.

6.3:2 The construction of non-kin familial social relations at work

The relational gender ideology operating within the division of work in traditional Chinese culture has continuity from the rural environment to the urban workplace for Chinese male peasant workers, operating through qualifications (cultural capital) and social contacts and relations within work (social capital). Family, in this research project, acts as a major resource for Chinese male peasant workers to construct their working class masculine identity. The symbolic meanings of carrying out familial gendered work played an

important part in the formation of their masculine subjective identities. Equally important, in the fieldwork, I found that the male peasant workers' identities were not simply about the work they were doing, but also how they dealt with social relations within the workplace (Hsu, 1971). During interviews with the men, I identified a continuity of familial gender relations within the urban workplace in terms of Confucian gender relations/hierarchy based on binary power relations between two structured relational members of society. According to Chinese tradition, the Five Cardinal Relationships are the most important interpersonal relations: 'between ruler and minister, between father and son, between husband and wife, between brothers, and between friends' (Ho, 1998:13). I conceptualized the inter-personal relationships within the urban workplace in terms of Zhao's (2007) notion of extended 'father-son relations'⁵ (F-S relations) in Confucianism, which also has an impact on other gendered inter-personal relations, such as those between ruler and minister, husband and wife, brother and sister, brother and brother that I will illustrate through the men's narratives in the following section.

6.3:2-1 Work mates as families

Familial relational gender role practices have become a major resource in constructing the identity of Chinese male peasant workers, as I have indicated above. More significantly, the interplay between the reconstruction of gender relations and work practices in the urban

⁵ Zhao (2007:85) conceptualizes the Confucian father and son relation, where she also extends the 'father-son' relation to six social gender types of father and son (F-S) relationship: 'natural F-S (flesh created, material support and spiritual guidance), fictive F-S (stepfather and stepson), kinship F-S (uncle-nephew, elder-younger brother), social analogical F-S (elder to younger, senior-junior, patron-client, master-slave), political analogical F-S (official-citizen, ruler-subject), spiritual guidance F-S (teacher-student, sage-common people, universal way and individual).'

workplace helped forge their masculine identity. For the male peasant workers, the workplace, was not just a place of work, it was also a 'second home'. They often saw their 'Lao Xiang', those who came to the city from the same hometown with them, as their 'new' family and constructed specific roles within the context of the men's new 'family' relations.

When I first noticed in my fieldwork within a local electronic assembly factory that peasant workers were constructing 'new' family relations with their workmates, I realized that such new formed 'family relations' contributed to the potential expansion of their limited social capital while living in the city. This included supporting and taking care of each other in many aspects of their lives. They were building up intimate relations with close workmates, many of them from the same home town or areas close by, who mostly spoke the same dialect. For example, Zhao Ting was a thirty-five years old worker in an electronic factory. In his life course of working as a peasant worker in the city, he had a few jobs in the past 10 years. Before the current job, he was working in an engineering factory as a turner, to which he was introduced by a *Lao Xiang*. Zhao Ting informed me that he was working under a guy, whom he addressed as *Shifu* (master, mentor who teaches you skills in the factory when you are still an apprentice; it literally translates as 'teacher, father' in Chinese).

Interviewer: Tell me about you and your Shifu.

Zhao Ting: He is from a town not far from mine, so we got on very well from the beginning. He taught me those langs and skills and some issues I have to be careful when I operate the machine

For Zhao Ting, *Shifu* is a person who acts more as a father figure than a leader at work, with whom he identified in his interpersonal relations in the workplace. As he recalled:

Zhao Ting: I always went to his home for dinner for a change (as they see it as a treat having dinner with a few more dishes than usual). His wife always brought some special local food from the village. He and his wife treated me very well. His home almost became my home as his son and daughter were working in the other cities so they always asked me to have dinner at their home. I remember once I went back home for the new year, he bought me some dry mushrooms and squid for me to take home for my family. He is a good guy. So I always listen to him...His father was very ill, so he and his wife left the factory to open a small store in his village to look after his father...I left the factory too as he told me the factory had a big deficit and asked me to find another job.'

After working as a turner for a few years, Zhao Ting got another job in an electronics factory and soon was promoted as workshop leader. There were fifteen female workers and five male workers in his workshop. As a senior figure at this factory, Zhao Ting's job was to carry out quality control of the products as leader of the workshop. For the people in the workshop, Zhao Ting acted like a big brother or father figure that they obeyed. Zhao Ting also had a good relationship with his colleagues outside the workshop. At lunch time with them one day in the staff canteen, Zhao Ting and three other workers were talking about preparing for a barbecue picnic at the weekend.

Du Wen (25 years old male worker): There must be a lot of people going to Queshi (the place for the barbecue) this Sunday. My older brother Lao Cai said it is always packed at holiday time. Do you still think we should go on that day?

Xiao Fan (24 years old female worker): Of course we go! We all decided the other day. Xiao Ling and me are preparing the chicken legs and wings, Ting Ge (brother, the name they call Zhao Ting).

Zhao Ting: We can go earlier to occupy the place.

Xiao Ling (28 years old female worker): Shall we go at 8 to catch the early ferry?

Zhao Ting: 9 o'clock will be fine. No one goes that early. By the way, Xiao Fan, do you need me to get any soft drinks. I can ask Lao Wu for the wholesale price. He got a Lao Xiang (person from the same home town) working in the wholesale market.

Xiao Ling: Du Wen's sister knows him. Let Du Wen do it.

Interviewer: Is your sister here too, Du Wen?

Du Wen: No, she is my Lao Xiang.

...

In their conversation, they highlighted the emergence of new extended 'family relations' with their workmates based on their 'real' familial gender relations. They treated each other as family members, respecting the old and taking care of the young and female. In the process of working in the city, they were establishing non-kin family relationships within the workplace and practicing their familial gender roles in their daily lives. They spent most of their time working together, so that their relations appeared to be similar to that between brother and brother, brother and sister, and father and son. This was accompanied by a traditional gendered familial hierarchy, based on and developed from the extended 'father-son' relationship operating within their rural homes. In this situation, male peasant workers were formulating their male subjectivities in a similar way to that operating within their rural families. For example, when Zhao Ting was working as an apprentice turner with his *Shifu*, he was playing out a role of 'son' by being obedient and loyal. While as the oldest man in the workshop led by him, Zhao Ting acted as a father figure who was expected to make decisions and to give orders to 'their family'.

At the same time, within a female-concentrated labour intensive manual factory, male peasant workers formulated their familial masculine subjectivities through traditional relational gender practices, such as making decisions and carrying out heavy 'work', while female workers were more involved in domestic tasks, as Xiao Fan and Xiao Ling illustrated by preparing food. In the men's narratives in the context of social relations

within the workplace, extended ‘father-son’ relations were enacted and performed in terms of their behaving in a protective brotherly way. For example, Li Yong revealed his sense of acting as a man through his response to his work colleagues.

Li Yong (20 years old): I remember last year when I was in a factory in Guangzhou, some people bullied a close friend of mine (because) he is little... You depend on your parents when you are home, while you depend on your friends while you are away from home...I just helped him a bit to get rid of those people... It was that time that I felt I could protect him and felt like a big brother...I don't usually fight with other people, but I cannot let my brother be bullied by those people...am I right?

Such extended ‘father-son’ relations and their ideology of gendered hierarchy were also displayed in inter-personal relations between older men and younger women and older women and younger men. These relations have their origin in local villages, as early studies on Chinese peasants (see Potter and Potter, 1990:8) suggest, male peasants of the same generation within a given lineage extended their family to consider themselves as brothers to each other and all women saw themselves as sisters. The men’s narratives made clear the legacy of traditional familial gender relations. In a contemporary context, they make sense of their gender identity through practicing these relational roles. Some of them are developing heterosexual relationships within these ‘familial’ relations. For example, Ah Wu (male, 22 years old) and Xiao Xin (female, 20 years old) came from the same village near the factory. They called each other ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ in public but people knew they were developing a love relationship.

Interviewer: Is she your girlfriend?

Ah Wu (22 years old): I don't know, she is my sister.

Interviewer: Do you like her?

Ah Wu: ... she is very nice, she always goes to buy 'liang cha' (herbal drink sold by local people) for me...She is also alone here. We are laoxiang...need to take care of each other...

The workplace has become an alternative cultural institution where male peasant workers construct their relational familial masculinities as practiced in their rural families. The family network was extended to the workplace, where a new established 'family network without kin' was taking place. When Ryan (2004:368) researched Irish female migrants in Britain, she suggested that 'familial networks may operate in highly gendered ways. Such networks may offer support and enable migrants to cope with hostile and adverse social environments.' Such a finding is compatible with the experience of Chinese male peasant workers and their non-related and extended family relations in urban spaces.

A main argument of this thesis is that the combination of the dearth of research on male peasant workers with the public misrepresentations of their lives in the city has lead to reductive stereotypes of these men. In response, their self-representations illustrate a more comprehensive picture. In gendered terms, there is a general sense of the men operating with dislocated masculinities and an accompanying lack of a traditional stability around being a husband/partner, father and son. However, the men's narratives clearly show their individual and collective agency in reinventing themselves within an urban space. Most significantly, this is achieved through the continuity of the development of familial gender relations in the workplace, within which a non-kinship familial relation was formed. Such social relations between the male peasant workers and their workmates can be captured by the conceptualization of family social relations in Confucianism as part of one body

characterized with intimacy and loyalty⁶. As I have illustrated, such extended father-son relations and non-kin family relations are important compensatory resources that serve to challenge their sense of dislocation and the marginalization of masculine identities, as they adjust to occupations marked by low skills, low pay and little respect in the public domain.

6.3:2-2 'Class consciousness' and/or 'father-son' relationship at work

In this chapter I argue that the formation of male peasant workers' working masculinities is of key importance in understanding their social position in a modernizing urban society. Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2003:39) acknowledge that 'studies on masculinity and class might be more fruitful if they moved away from privileging workplace practices as defining men to broader cultural practices that men take up.' In my field work, I found broader cultural practices were being taken up by the men in the workplace. Through new occupational socialization, the deployment of a traditional extended 'father-son' relationship had become an important resource for them to make sense of their social position within the workplace, where they were positioned at the base of the social hierarchy in relation to their employers.

Jiang Xiaoping(38 years old): When I was in the army, I was an automobile soldier. I don't need to learn how to drive in the factory, but I have learnt how to be a person in the society. ... I am 'chi ku nai lao' (stoic, working hard). Sometimes some leader of the workshop would like to use a car and asked me to drive. Last month, Lao Chen asked me to give a lift for his parents to go back to

⁶ Hwang, K.K. (1999:169) refers to Confucian Rites, which conceptualize family members as one body: 'Father and son are one body; husband and wife, brother, are all one body. The relationship between father and son is like that between head and feet. Husband and wife are a combination of two separate parts of one body; brothers are the four limbs' (Confucian Rites: Chapter on Mourning Dress).

the village. They were not supposed to use the factory car for their private matters... I am ok with it as long as the managing director doesn't know. In the end they (leaders of workshop) are leaders, it'd be better not to offend them. They know I am a 'lao shi ren' (honest and humble) and trust me. It's better not to establish an enemy when you work in the city.

Song Shan (20 years old): They like my personality...I talk a lot to our manager, having jokes with her...I am very guai (obedient) in front of them...you are alone at work, you need to deal well with the relations with the boss so that they will take care of you.

The notion of 'how to be a person' (zen yang zuo ren) is of importance in constructing male peasant workers' masculine subjectivities. As they stated in their narratives, being *lao shi* (honest and humble) and *chi ku nai lao* (working hard and suffering difficulties); *guai* (being obedient) and *gao hao guan xi* (dealing well in social relations) illustrated the key masculine characteristics that they needed to display in order to integrate themselves into the social relations of the factory. One reading of the men's accounts is that these characteristics reveal that they were aware of their marginal social and economic position as peasant workers in the city. The practice of 'how to be a person' was developed within an urban context of their survival and making sense of their new social position, which secured their place within the factory, while generating their consciousness of class subordination. This is compatible with Willis's (2000/ [1977]) description of working class shop-floor culture and its associated masculinity for working class young men's personal survival and production of a subordinated class consciousness. In Willis' (2000/ [1977]) work, there is a strong sense of intergenerational class consciousness among his male participants. This is based on a regionally based collective understanding of class domination and struggle. In contrast, as I outlined in Chapter One, the concept of class in contemporary China is theoretically underdeveloped. Within this context, some of my participants' accounts appeared to show little visible class resistance.

Jiang Xi (21 years old): I learnt a lot during my work in the factory, I learnt how to bear the supervisor's criticism of my work. When I face difficulty, I have to learn to be jianqiang (tough), to be lenjing (calm). You can't do anything when they've got the power. We are all here to make money, as long as they give you money, you should always listen to them.

Jiang Xi's comment which was common among the peasant workers suggests a strategy of accommodation rather than resistance to the factory management. As illustrated in Chapter Four, a radical form of resistance was developed when the terms of accommodation between the men and the management broke down. As Jiang Xi indicated above, these terms centred around their wages that enabled them to maintain their masculine identity as a respectable and responsible man in relation to their rural families. As Collinson (1992: 45-46) maintains in analyzing workers' subjectivities within the workplace, 'by emphasizing the various options, cultural resources and strategic agencies available to and deployed by workers in organizations, it is therefore more accurate to refer to resistance.'

A second reading of their narratives suggests that the positions the men took up at work were culturally perceived as relational. For example, they needed to locate themselves within a lower position within the dominant institutional social hierarchy, in which a Confucian ideology of 'father-son' relations was played out. As indicated in Chapter Five, the father-son relation within Chinese kinship is of central material and symbolic significance to the wider society. As Zhao (2007) explains,

'In Confucian society, the kinship family is the cornerstone of society because, in the traditional Confucian mind, society is itself an enlarged family and the family is in turn a miniature society. Therefore, the ruler and the father are endowed with the same function; the king in his country and the father in his home hold the same position.' (Zhao, 2007:2)

From this perspective, notions of accommodation or resistance are not able to capture the complexity of the male peasant workers' responses to their experience of the new urban workplace. On the one hand, the men appeared to adopt a submissive position in relation to the factory management. For example, this was expressed in terms of obedience and taking orders from those in authority and being hard working, humble and even suffering in their social interactions with their employers. They realized that working in the city was not just materially about working hard to make money for their families; it was also about symbolically accommodating themselves within the urban space where they were subordinated within the post-Mao modernization project. On the other hand, the 'father-son' relations according to Confucian tradition meant that they would receive the protection of the management in terms of their 'paternal' responsibilities. The above indicated to me the cultural specificity of using western notions of class, class consciousness and class struggle within a non-western context. This is not to suggest that class analysis is inappropriate in contemporary China. Rather, future research needs to develop the culturally-based interconnections between gender, class and other social categories within contemporary China to provide insights into the post-reform modernization period (Skeggs, 1997). At the same time, the above can be read as an example of my critique of western late modernity theorists' assumption that modernity naturally displaces tradition. The male peasant workers above provided a more complex picture in which they deployed traditional cultural practices to make sense of their 'modern' masculine identity within the workplace.

6.3:2-3 *Critical understanding of the new 'familial' men at work*

Earlier western literature suggests that men tend to socialize with other male colleagues more than female colleagues in the workplace (Cockburn, 1991; Roper, 1994). However, such gender divisions in terms of socialization were overshadowed by the extended family relations in the case of Chinese peasant workers on the shopfloor, especially when they were located in female concentrated factories. Living out familial gender relations within the urban workplace, on the one hand, sustained harmonious social relations, re-constructing and maintaining the men's masculine subjective identities. On the other hand, such practices also generated other critical meanings in response to Chinese modernization, within which power relations operated between new forms of non-kin families, as illustrated in the last section. However, ethnographic observation suggested that extended 'father-son' relations were temporary; challenged by a range of different elements, such as job hierarchy and the male peasant workers' place of origin.

Importantly, power within the urban workplace was diversely operationalised. For example, there were power relations operating among male peasant workers themselves, and between male and female peasant workers. The following narrative from Song Shan illustrates how some peasant workers occupied more powerful positions at work. While acknowledging the general 'harmonious' style of masculinities within the workplace, some participants revealed there were also negative power relations operating among male peasant workers themselves. For example, Song Shan revealed that he was bullied by his male supervisor:

'People such as us from other provinces are different from those who are from the local surrounding village...They (supervisors) always look after people from their

hometown. I have been blamed by my manager of the workshop quite a lot...he always criticizes my work for not reaching the standard. So I have to do it again. But my salary relies on how many products I assemble...sometimes I earn very little money for a day...' (Song Shan, 20 years old)

Individual male peasant workers were able to develop a dominant masculinity from within their general subordinated position by deploying a traditional authoritarian male gender role. I argued above, within specific contexts, the newly formulated migrating masculinities were not dominating but harmonious. Their male identities were demonstrated not through conventional masculinity in the patriarchal system but through masculinities formulated within the workplace by adopting family values in traditional Chinese culture. However, Song Shan's account challenges such harmony, as there were other factors operating, such as different places of origin, that made visible the negative power relations among the peasant workers' within the workplace. The men felt it was easier to get on with each other and pursue harmonious gender relations with people from the same place.

The conversation between Song Shan, Jiang Xi and myself illustrated another factor, that of geographical hierarchy, which impacted upon the power relations operating among the peasant workers within the workplace.

Song Shan: He (Jiang Xi) is very popular with the girls, they all like him...When he plays basketball with the other workshop, they (the girls) all cheer around him...

Jiang Xi: Never, don't be joking, ask your Chaozhou Mei (Song Shan's girlfriend from nearby city) to introduce her friend to me la... Don't listen to him (he told me). I always stay around with my Laoxiang...We have common language... Unlike those people from the surrounding local village...they can't speak good mandarin, sometime they don't understand what I say, sometimes I don't understand what they say...Those Chaozhou Mei don't talk to us.

Interviewer: why?

Jiang Xi: I don't know, they only talk to their people.

This geographical hierarchy was complex and shifting. As a researcher, it was not possible to capture this complexity through discussions with the peasant workers. It appeared as intuitive knowledge that was locally lived out rather than explicitly expressed in everyday conversations. For example, people from local southern rural areas were seen to be more privileged in terms of language and location than those people from other provinces. Also, with the expansion of Chinese modernization and urbanization, some rural areas have become an integral part of urban economic development, providing job opportunities for local peasants (Liang et al. 2002). This has resulted in a barrier developing between the local peasant workers and migrating peasant workers.

As I have illustrated, the male peasant workers in urban workplaces maintained relatively harmonious gender relationships in relation to their rural colleagues and urban employer within the existing social hierarchy. Meanwhile, such social relations within workplaces have also generated different types of masculine subjective identities given their self positioning in these social relations. However, I also noted that there were diverse complex sets of power relations operating in different social contexts.

At the same time, their low status as subordinated working class men in the city can be contrasted with the high status that they received when they returned home. For example,

Wang Hai recalled:

Wang Hai: I went back home last year to move into the house I built for my family and the family and relatives were very pleased to see me back. They thought I had a successful business here in the city. Of course I wouldn't tell them how tiring and difficult it is. People tell the happiness but never mention the worries (报喜不

报忧). Some people asked me through my father to introduce their children jobs in the city...people respect you when you come home from city.

In Wang Hai's narrative about his changing status from urban working class migrant to high prestige rural returnee, he suggested that his shifting identity was based on his being able to demonstrate his filial piety by bringing honour to his parents by supporting his extended family, thus fulfilling his duty as a Chinese man.

6.4 Conclusion

The Chapter has explored how the male peasant workers negotiated and constructed their masculine subjective identities within the public domain of the urban workplace. There is a specific examination of non-conventional male occupations, such as service and light industrial work due to the geographical location of the research. This is important in enabling alternative self-representations to the conventional public images of the men in traditional 'hard' working class occupations, such as construction and mining. At the same time, a critical examination of their occupational habitus reveals the creative strategies (agency) they deploy within constrained circumstances (structure). Importantly, it is argued that symbolically and materially Confucian 'father-son' relations are an important resource for the male peasant workers to creatively engage with the social relations of the urban workplace and to (re)construct their masculine identity through social interaction at work. The interpretivist ontological and epistemological position adopted in carrying out the empirical work allowed a specific focus on understanding how the men make sense of their new working lives through the construction of occupationally-based non-kin familial relations.

Conclusion

Summary of the Research

The conclusion summarizes the main arguments and findings of the research and suggests future research themes in this field of analysis in relation to the questions that have been addressed in the thesis. Perhaps the main conclusion resolves around the several shifts that I have made in the process of carrying this project. At a theoretical, methodological and personal level, the main shift has been from what I assumed to be *simple* was in *fact highly* complex. I have expressed this in terms of needing to *make* rather than *take* the research question in addressing the male peasant workers' rural-urban migration.

The thesis has been successful in achieving a primary purpose of the research, to address the absence of Chinese men as gendered subjects in contemporary migration to the city. The four main bodies of work I explored - Chinese literature on rural-urban labour migration, Chinese feminist scholarship on female peasant workers, western research on men, masculinities and identity and new British feminist cultural studies scholarship enabled me to develop a theoretical framework for this study (chapter 2). This framework enabled me to address my research objectives: to develop a critical understanding of the current Chinese social order as a result of the transformation from a Maoist to post-Mao era; to critically engage with Chinese male peasant workers' narratives located within the family and the workplace; to contribute to an understanding of the impact of gender and class formation on peasant workers; to

critically investigate public representations of male peasant workers and to contribute to current intellectual debates about Chinese modernization.

I began by critiquing traditional sociological understandings of rural-urban labour migration that raised important questions about the need to address the re-emergence of class stratification (chapter 1). This provided a basis on which to explore Chinese feminist scholarship that addresses the absence of gendering in studies on internal migration. In turn, western scholarship enabled me to complement Chinese feminist research on the formation of ‘Dagong Mei’ (working girls or female migrant workers). Most importantly, a British feminist theoretical position, with its central focus on culturally-based class/gender dynamics in women’s lives, pointed to the need for me to move away from the narrow structuralist questions of the social stratification of peasant workers that tends to close off investigation, to critically explore male peasant workers’ identity formation, while examining the complex inter-relation between of gender and class (chapter 2).

Equally significant in *making* my research question was the recognition of the autonomous validity of methodology (chapter 3). In retrospect, when I began this research project, I had a highly simplistic view of methodology, as the deployment of methods that would strategically deliver my findings based on my theoretical framework. This reductive approach was challenged by the theoretical position I was developing, as outlined above. But of equal importance was my experience in the field. At an early stage of my fieldwork, I came to realize the limitation of my research techniques, for example, in terms of using a questionnaire. This directed me to develop a wider research stance in terms of life histories and an ethnographic approach. In this process, marked by a developing understanding of the centrality of reflexivity, I began to appreciate the absence of peasant workers’ self-representation in work on internal

migration. This resulted in my epistemologically privileging the men's narratives. This had the effect of opening up the research and directed me to systematically address issues I had not considered when I began this research.

Although I had read methodological texts on the classical philosophical issues of ontology and epistemology, my research practice in the field highlighted the limits of my understanding. The combination of new theoretical work with which I engaged and working in the field listening to the men's narratives led me to see the overly structuralist assumptions of sociological theories of stratification, with which I began the research project. The shift to an interpretivist position enabled a more systematic exploration of the men's identity formation and understanding of their complex subjectivities within the process of rural-urban migration. In turn, this highlighted the need to investigate the interplay between structure and agency as it impacted on their private and public lives (chapters 5 and 6). More specifically, I examined how male peasant workers accommodated themselves within urban spaces with an emphasis on the interplay of a number of factors - shifting family lives, familial and occupational kinship relations, rural and occupational peer networks, and gendered social relations within urban spaces. These institutional spaces - the family and the workplace provide filters through which meanings of migration are culturally produced and reproduced in their daily interaction and practices in the construction of their masculine identities.

Given the absence of men from the literature on migration and gender, at an early stage of the research it seemed sufficient to provide a 'voice' for the male peasant workers to tell their story of social marginalisation and discrimination (chapter 2). However, a main limitation with this approach was that it failed to address the dynamic impact of material conditions on the rural men's experiences of urban life. A key element of these material conditions was the Chinese modernization process since the late 1970s. I

proceeded to systematically explore the current dominant discourse of the modernization project and the formation of class that impact upon the formation of the men's migrant identities. In turn, the men's narratives made problematic taken for granted dominant national understandings of modernity and modernization (chapter 1).

Contesting the notions of modernization and modernity suggested that public narratives - particularly those of government, media and art - are central mechanisms that frame the general population's understanding of Chinese rural-urban labour migration (chapter 4). This raised the need to critically engage with a socio-historical analysis of the public gaze and its impact on the cultural production of masculinities. Discourse analysis of the secondary data traced the shifting discursive formation of peasant workers from the pre-reform to the post-Mao reform period. These contradictory dominant public representations were of significance in illustrating the projection of gendered urban selves (local residents) and rural 'others' (male peasant workers). The focus on urban residents' adoption of these public representations emphasised the need to address the unequal power relations operating upon the rural men within their urban encounters. At the same time, we see how dominant public understandings of these men contributed to their social stratification. Most importantly, this included their social positioning in terms of what the peasant workers were perceived to lack, the cultural capital associated with the emergence of the dominant discourse of post-Mao modernization.

In short, my engagement with the theoretical and methodological literature, alongside my early working in the field, made clear the advantages of adopting a reflexive interplay between theory, methods and data collection. This directed (pushed me) to thoroughly question my own assumptions based on the cultural habitus inherited from my early years growing up in urban china that informed the simple theoretical and

methodological frameworks with which I began my thesis. The adoption of a more complex perspective, outlined above, enabled me to successfully achieve the research aim and objectives set out in the Introduction.

The Significance of the Research

The thesis as the first qualitative study of Chinese male peasant workers makes a number of contributions to the field of analysis. These include the following:

- Changing Chinese men and masculinities

This research contributes a valuable account of Chinese men and masculinities to the global masculinities project. It moves beyond, while building on, western theories of masculinity including sex role, pro-feminist and cultural analytical approaches, locating the investigation of Chinese masculinity through grounded local narratives and experiences.

- A shifting Chinese 'self'

The analysis of the men's life histories provides insights into their self identity formation, contributing to a broader understanding self and identity formation in a globally-based Chinese society. Importantly, it also attempts to bridge the western concept of *habitus* with the Chinese notion of a *relational self* in order to capture the men's reinvention of their selves in relation to substantive issues of class and gender relations within urban spaces.

- Critical understanding of Chinese ‘working class’

The mobility of migrant labour is creating a new ‘class system’ that has not yet been officially recognized by the Chinese government and remains under-theorized. The thesis makes a contribution to this field of inquiry. In response to the recreation of class in a post-Mao Chinese society and current literature portraying Chinese rural-urban migrant workers as a new working class, my research illustrates the importance of capturing an understanding of male rural-urban migrant workers’ position in society through their subjectivities, meanings and creative agency that goes beyond the economic determinist accounts of earlier studies of class stratification of migration. It achieves this by addressing the interconnections between gender, class and other social categories within contemporary China to provide insights into the post-reform modernization period. At the same time, this provides valuable insights into a classic sociological problem, the relation between structure and agency. The above also makes a contribution to the field by indicating the cultural specificity of using western notions of class, class consciousness and class struggle within a non-western context.

- Chinese local narratives of modernity

This study of rural men and masculinity makes an important contribution to understanding contemporary definitions of Chineseness that have been suppressed in the context of neoliberal modernization and development which assumes that modernity will or must displace tradition. The men’s narratives suggested a more complex picture. They highlighted the central role of Confucian gender relations, represented by male

friendship and bonding, extended kin relations, filial responsibility and emotional development that serve as important resources in the formation of their ‘modern’ masculine identities in the process of rural-urban labour migration. For example, the men illustrate how Confucian ‘father-son’ relations and its extended forms of gender relations and practices (albeit reworked) enabled them to creatively recreate the social relations of the workplace to establish important support networks. These findings resonate with Dirlik’s (1996) suggestion of ‘alternative modernities. He describes:

‘the identification of alternative modernities, not in terms of reified cultures, but in terms of alternative historical trajectories that have been suppressed by the hegemony of capitalist modernity’ (Dirlik, 1996:118).

In short, the research project provides evidence of an alternative narrative of the future of China and its citizens that challenges the reductive account of the modernization project with its aim of ‘catching up with the west’. It argues for further work to decouple the *economic* (technology, science, market) from the *social*, *cultural* and *political*, as illustrated in the rural peasant workers’ creative responses to the constraints and opportunities of life in the city.

Methodologically, the thesis makes a contribution to the literature by highlighting the productiveness of theory-led qualitative research, the validity of methodological autonomy, new insights emerging from epistemologically privileging research participants’ narratives, reflexivity and a nuanced ethical code when deploying western concepts in ‘non-western’ contexts.

The Limitations of the Research and Future Research Themes

There is a need to address limitations of the research and future research themes. As I noted in the Chapter Three, the location of the research led to a focus on male peasant workers in small scale manual and service sector industries. However, it did not include those men who work in the heavy industry sector, such as construction, mining and large scale manufacturing. Future research within these occupations could provide the opportunity to further explore the impact of gender/class dynamics on men's working lives. At the same time, it could empirically illustrate the multiplicity of masculinities.

I suggested in Chapter Three that on reflection my study could have collected more quantitative data. Future quantitative research could address qualitative studies in this field of analysis, such as my thesis, with reference to issues of validity within a multi-method approach.

Also, though I was studying a number of Chinese male peasant workers within southern China, this is not a homogenous study. The men's narratives about their lives referred to a number of variables, including marriage status, family structure, type of work and so on. However, due to the research objectives and theoretical frame adopted some of these variables received too little consideration. A further shortcoming of my research was that less attention was paid to male migrant workers who came from local surrounding rural villages. With the expansion of urbanization, some surrounding rural villages have been urbanized with local people becoming less visible than those from other places. The former with their geographical closeness to their hometown as well as their use of a local language and cultural practices may have a different experience to those people from other provinces, which future research could focus on.

My research explored cultural practices in relation to the family and the workplace. Further research might consider a wider range of spaces, as recorded in the male peasant workers' narratives with reference to shopping, dry skiing and internet surfing. There needs to be a more systematic analysis of diverse lifestyles, consumption and new technologies which complements a class analysis of the peasant workers' lives.

Given the aim of the research was to provide a critical understanding of Chinese male peasant workers' identity formation, I did not select one specific generation of male peasant workers. Also, the study was an early attempt in this field of analysis, aiming to include men on the gendered map of migration. However, my research data revealed important generational differences in terms of lifestyles and a general sensibility of migrating to the city. Further investigation on specific generational groups could provide a more comprehensive picture of differences alongside the continuities, particularly rural-based class continuities that my research emphasised.

Given the work available on female peasant workers, examined throughout the thesis, alongside my study of male peasant workers, the next stage maybe to develop an inclusive study focussing on both genders. Theoretically, this would enable a systematic interrogation of the intersectionality of categories among peasant workers, including gender, class, sexuality, age and ethnicity. Methodologically, this might address a criticism that a single qualitative study fails to address the question of generalisability.

Knowledge Transfer

During the research process, addressing theoretical and methodological questions while participating in the men's lives, I asked myself what was the purpose of my research? In

response, this thesis seeks to contribute to government policy making as well as future academic research.

First, given the current historical context of modernization and development in China, public (mis)representations (government, media, the academy) are projecting rural-urban labour migration as a major social problem and highly reductionist accounts of male peasant workers as ‘modernization losers’. This leads to government policy makers adopting over-simplified solutions to social stratification and integration within cities.

- Policy making on the issue of rural-urban labour migration

This thesis based on the men’s life histories of relocating from rural villages to cities reveals a more complex picture, in which they do not passively accept the structural constraints of migration, nor display dysfunctional social lives or pathological masculinities. They spoke of severe structural material constraints in terms of access to work, housing and education but in response they were constructing complex and diverse cultural practices. The thesis suggests that government policy makers need to engage with these men’s narratives. Importantly, this theory-led empirical study proposes that male peasant workers constitute an important social *issue* rather than *problem*. In order to work with this proposition, government policy makers need to rethink the conceptual assumptions that they are making about these men, life in urban spaces and the modernization project that is currently central to the cultural production of images of Chinese (male) peasant workers. The following incident provides an example of locating ‘problem peasant workers’ in the bigger theoretical and political picture.

In May 2010, it was reported that there were twelve peasant workers who committed suicide since January 2010, in one of the largest manufacture plants – Foxconn, in Shenzhen, southern China. The Taiwanese company is the manufacturer of Apple iPhone and other famous brands of consumer mobile technologies. There are more than 400,000 employers working in the Shenzhen plant. Most of them are peasant workers. In this spate of suicides and attempted suicides, the company is accused of bad employment and management practices, in terms of long working hours, low wages and military management, which are seen as contributing to the large number of suicides. There is also media speculation about their deaths being associated with organized crime within the plant. Whatever the specific reasons for the suicides, it is important to address the conditions in which these people are producing for other (globally-based) people new ways of modern life and consumer culture, which are currently celebrated with the release of iPhone and iPad. In response, the government and social elites inside and outside of the country are attempting to identify the specific causes of this series of suicide. However, they are failing to explore the more complex picture of rural people's experience of migration to work in urban spaces. My thesis provides a valuable account in understanding the complexity of the public and private lives of peasant workers that might inform future policy responses.

- Gender inequality

This research has also raised an important issue for government policy makers in relation to gender inequality. First, policy makers need to accept the conceptual expansion of the term gender, as illustrated in this study, and include men as gendered subjects. Second, there is a need to acknowledge a notion of multiple masculinities. We saw in chapter 2 that Chinese feminists addressing discrimination against female peasant workers assumed that male peasant workers were a privileged social group in a

traditional patriarchal society. However, as was clearly illustrated in chapter 4, established urban residents' negative 'othering' of migrant men challenges simplistic conceptions of how power operates. Gender equality within the government's objective of building a 'harmonious society' needs to address how the intersectionality of categories plays out in people's lives within different contexts producing a complex range of power relations.

Second, my research as indicated above raises several themes for potential future research.

- Young male peasant workers, masculinities and risk

On 21st June 2010, 'All China Federation of Trade Union' published a research report ¹, emphasising the importance of a new generation of peasant workers as they encounter a more complex urban environment with different experiences and expectations compared to an early generation of peasant workers. In the suicide incident in Foxconn, it was reported that 8 of the 12 suicides were committed by young male peasant workers, aged from 19 to 24. Young male peasant workers' accounts of their experience of working in urban spaces were discussed within my thesis, emphasising the continuities with their parents' understanding of familial social relations and more specifically, filial responsibilities. However, what were underplayed were the generationally-specific experiences of rural young men living and working in the city. Undoubtedly, there are also important generational differences. The report on young men's suicides resonates with findings in western societies on an increase in young

¹ All China Federation of Trade Union (2010) *Research Report on Peasant Workers of the New Generation*. <http://www.acftu.org/template/10004/file.jsp?cid=222&aid=83614> (accessed on 21-06-2010).

male suicide. Future research on young Chinese masculinities within a framework of the Risk Society may tap into the impact of global influences on young people (Beck, 1992).

- Migrating masculinities

My research project raises possible theoretical and methodological questions about continuities between migrating masculinities as lived out by Chinese male peasant workers and Chinese transnational male migrants, such as university students. It also suggests that in-depth examination of male migrants' everyday practices through life history narrations can produce a counter-stereotypical picture of migrants. At the same time, the thesis engages with debates about changing notions of Chineseness within the modernization project. Such debates may become increasingly important as China emerges as a major global power and western societies come to focus on such questions as: Who do they think they are? Transnational Chinese migrants living in the west may become increasingly visible within this shifting economic and political context. The findings within my thesis on how rural men migrating to the cities have constructed identities may provide important insights for Chinese transnational migrants within western societies.

- Middle class urban men and masculinity

This research addressed a specific cohort of men. However, during the research process, I also became aware of the different life-styles of urban middle class young men both in China and in the U.K. The latter were a reference point in thinking about the lives of the young male peasant workers. The comparative analysis also raised questions from a different space, English universities, about what constitutes Chineseness and Chinese masculinities and femininities. Talking this through on the net with friends across the

globe, there is a lot of interest in these questions. I hope that my study may contribute to a future range of studies investigating different cohorts of the population. National identity formation and reinventing our institutional - family life, workplace, leisure – and personal selves is of critical significance as a globally-based China continues to experience rapid socio-economic, political and cultural transformations.

Appendix I: Research Participants

Interviewees	Age	Sex ²	Occupation when Interview	Hukou ³
Yao Yu	27	F	Civil Servant	U
Wang Ling	49	F	School Teacher	U
Ying Qi	40	F	Housewife	U
Yu Ke	20	F	University Student	U
Sun Ying	26	F	TV Editor	U
Yang Zong	47	M	Managing Director of Factory	U
Secretary Zhao	52	M	Party Secretary	U
Xu Zheng	17	M	Waiter	R
Ah Fu	19	M	Factory Worker	R
Xiao Cai	20	M	Factory Worker	R
Li Yong	20	M	Factory Worker	R
Song Shan	20	M	Factory Worker	R
Jiang Xi	21	M	Factory Worker	R
Wang Tao	22	M	Factory Worker	R
Ah Wu	22	M	Factory Worker	R
Zhu Yanhui	23	M	Factory Worker	R
Du Wen	25	M	Factory Worker	R
Xiao Zhang	30	M	Factory Worker	R
Cai Wu	30	M	Technician	R
Wang Hai	32	M	Fruit Seller/Self-employed	R
Huang Lixing	32	M	Factory Worker	R
Chen Wu	32	M	Security Guard	R
Guo Tianhai	32	M	Factory Worker	R
Hui Ying	33	M	Factory Worker	R
Pan Peifeng	34	M	Security Guard	R
Liu Hai	35	M	Technician	R
Liu Xiong	35	M	Tricycle Rider	R
Zhao Ting	35	M	Factory Worker	R
Lao Ding	36	M	Factory Worker	R
Jiang Xiaoping	38	M	Factory Lorry Driver	R
Gao Xing	43	M	Factory Worker	R
Huang Ping	44	M	Factory Worker	R
Guo Jintian	44	M	Factory Worker	R
Yang Hui	45	M	Factory Worker	R
Lao Tang	48	M	House Cleaner/Self-employed	R
Xiao Xin	20	F	Factory Worker	R
Xiao Fan	24	F	Factory Worker	R
Xiao Ling	28	F	Factory Worker	R
Yang Erjie	42	F	Workshop Leader	R

² M; Male; F:Female

³ Household Registration: U:Urban/Non-Agricultural; R: Rural/Agricultural

Appendix II: Research Location

Location A: Shantou, China⁴



⁴ Source: maps.google.co.uk accessed on 30th May 2010

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